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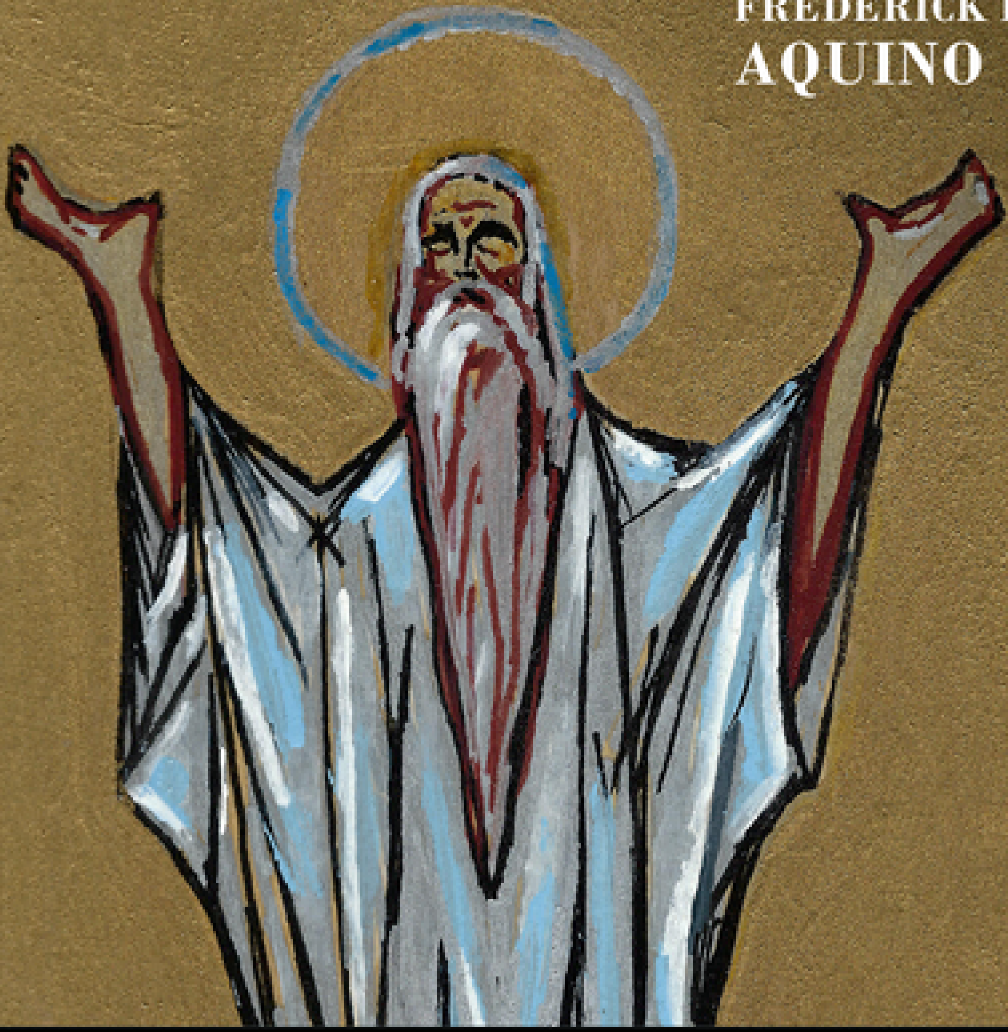

# The Oxford Handbook *of* THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THEOLOGY

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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*Edited by*

WILLIAM J. ABRAHAM

*and*

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To William Alston and Alvin Plantinga, pioneers
in the epistemology of theology

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| | |
|---|---|
| *Amb.Io.* | *Ambigua ad Iohannem* (*Difficult Passages Addressed to John*) |
| *C* | *The Interior Castle* |
| *Car.* | *Capita de caritate* (*Centuries on Love*) |
| *C.Cels.* | *Contra Celsum* |
| *CJn* | *Commentary on John* |
| *Conf.* | *Conferences* |
| *EN* | *Nicomachean Ethics* |
| *Ep.* | *Epistula* (*Letter*) |
| *GA* | *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* |
| *H.Gn.* | *Homilies on Genesis* |
| *Hom.Ez.* | *Homilies on Ezekiel* |
| *Hom.Lev.* | *Homilies on Leviticus* |
| *Inst.* | *Institutes* |
| *KD* | *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (*Church Dogmatics*) |
| *L* | *The Book of Her Life* |
| *Met.* | *Metaphysics* |
| *Myst.* | *Mystagogia* (*Mystagogy*) |
| NKJV | New King James Version |
| NRSV | New Revised Standard Version |
| *OC* | *On Certainty* |
| *PeriArch.* | *Peri Archon* |
| *Philoc.* | *Philocalia* |
| *QD* | *Quaestiones et dubia* (*Questions and Doubtful Passages*) |
| *Q.Thal.* | *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (*Questions Addressed to Thalassius*) |
| *Rep.* | *Republic* |
| RSV | Revised Standard Version |
| *SCG* | *Summa contra Gentiles* |
| *ST* | *Summa Theologiae* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *T* | *Spiritual Testimonies* |
| *Th.oec.* | *Capita theologica et oeconomica* (*Chapters on Theology and the Economy*) |
| *US* | *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* |
| *W* | *The Way of Perfection* |
| *WJE* | *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* |

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# INTRODUCTION

## *The Epistemology of Theology*

WILLIAM J. ABRAHAM
AND FREDERICK D. AQUINO

It has been commonplace in epistemology to give careful attention not just to the subject itself as a general enterprise but also to explore in detail the epistemology of particular academic disciplines. The epistemology of science, for example, has received the lion's share of interest; but attention has also been given to mathematics, history, aesthetics, and ethics. The crucial warrant for these later developments goes back to Aristotle's insistence on what we might call a principle of epistemic fit (*EN* 1.3 in Crisp 2000: 5). We should fit our epistemic evaluations in an appropriate way to the subject matter under investigation. As a result, we do not expect historical claims to be evaluated by the kind of arguments that would apply to mathematics and the natural sciences. Surprisingly—given the attention directed to theological claims and the wealth of materials in both theology and philosophy—this principle has not been systematically explored in the case of theology.

To be sure, we acknowledge that this Aristotelian epistemic principle, like most epistemic principles, is contested. Epistemologists have naturally wanted a generic epistemology that would work across the board, regardless of subject matter. There have been plenty of epistemologists who have shared this goal even when it comes to theology. We have no desire to exclude this option and readily welcome its proponents to the table. Yet we are not persuaded that Aristotle is wrong and therefore consider it entirely appropriate to proceed on the assumption that his insight is both correct and fruitful. Those who disagree simply need to be aware that this is the framework we think appropriate; they are welcome to make their case on the other side; we simply hope our work will still be of interest to them and will provoke an illuminating response. For now we think that the principle of epistemic fit creates space for the work that follows.

In this volume, we intend to remove the aforementioned lacuna by providing an orderly, constructive investigation of the epistemology of theology. By epistemology of theology, we mean a critical enquiry of appropriate epistemic concepts and theories in or related to theology. This involves examining and articulating what counts as appropriate epistemic evaluation in theology. The wide-ranging nature of this kind of enquiry can be seen in the following distinction. On the one hand, this volume focuses on standard epistemic concepts that are usually thought of as questions about norms and sources of theology (e.g. reason; experience; tradition; scripture; revelation). On the other hand, it explores some general epistemic concepts that can be related to theology (e.g. wisdom; understanding; virtue; evidence; testimony; scepticism; disagreement).

We believe that the time is ripe in both philosophy and theology for such an undertaking. There is a great need for the development of this new conversation that will take its natural place in the intersection of theology and epistemology. Accordingly, we seek in this volume to spell out how the epistemology of theology, as a new subdiscipline, attends more fully to the epistemological issues that arise in the course of doing Christian theology.

## Carving out the Epistemology of Theology

The time for unpacking and fleshing out the contours of the epistemology of theology is propitious. On the one hand, the whole field of epistemology has been revolutionized over the last fifty years. One fruitful and refreshing feature of recent work in epistemology is the expansion of its topics (see Alston 2005; Goldman and Whitcomb 2011; Greco and Turri 2012; Haddock, Millar, and Pritchard 2010; and Kvanvig 2005). The landscape includes, but is not limited to, developing accounts of knowledge, rationality, justification, warrant, understanding, wisdom, the intellectual virtues, and the social dimensions of cognition (e.g. testimony; trust; authority). Along these lines, some have already shown how different theological topics can be addressed in light of these recent developments in epistemology (e.g. Abraham 1990, 1998, 2006; Alston 1991, 1999; Greco 2009, 2012; Mavrodes 1988; Mitchell 1973, 1994; Moser 2008; Plantinga 2000; Swinburne 2005; Wainwright 1995, 2016; Wolterstorff 1995; and Zagzebski 2012). More importantly, these projects have paved the way for fuller theological appropriation and for moving ahead with the task of carving out the landscape of the epistemology of theology. As a result, the boundaries between philosophy and theology have been traversed in productive ways. This creates space for constructive work in epistemology as it crops up within theology.

On the other hand, there are signs that some theologians are ready to participate in the development of the epistemology of theology. They have become aware of the role of epistemological assumptions in their own work, and are clearly ready to see epistemological issues as constitutive of their own work, in that they cannot avoid questions about the intellectual status of their claims about God (e.g. Abraham 1998, 2006; Aquino 2004; Coakley 2009; and Marshall 2000). Moreover, there is a wealth of material to draw on in both earlier and more recent discussions within theology. Theologians have their own proposals to bring to the feast; they do not have to wait on the crumbs that fall from the philosophers' table. Given the extraordinary diversity (or chaos) within theology at present, it is clear that beginning students are acutely aware of the need to sort through how to adjudicate the rival options in a responsible manner. They cannot really do so without getting into the epistemology of theology.

We strive to make it clear in this volume that the Christian tradition encourages, rather than inhibits, the pursuit of epistemological questions. Along these lines, recent work in epistemology can help theologians make the relevant distinctions and alert them to epistemic components in the Christian tradition that have been ignored, neglected, or not formulated adequately. For example, some recent work in virtue epistemology may help identify epistemic materials in the canonical heritage that stress the importance of the proper function of cognitive faculties, conversion, volitional openness, and transformation for knowledge of God. Also, 'ongoing work on the nature of perception may throw invaluable light on ways of thinking about perception of the divine' (Abraham 1998: 478; see also Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2012). When the epistemic proposals, insights, and suggestions embedded in the canonical heritage of the Christian tradition are brought to light, we hope that other theologians and philosophers will join us in pursuing these matters carefully, rigorously, and thoroughly.

A project of this sort requires the development of an illuminating map of the terrain. Given that this is uncharted territory we simply have to strike out as best as we can, hoping that our initial efforts can be radically improved as we proceed and as others join the work. We do have, for example, a good sense of what the well-developed field of epistemology consists of, and so we are not reinventing the wheel here. We can also scout out other subdisciplines within epistemology; say, the epistemology of science, where there is a wealth of material. However, the gains from general epistemology have to be handled with care. There are generic considerations that cut across subject matter (e.g. perception; memory; and inference) but the epistemology of history differs prima facie from the epistemology of science precisely because the former deals with human action and the latter with the natural world. Likewise, we should expect that the subject matter of theology would make a significant difference in how we pursue appropriate epistemological insights.

Accordingly, we recognize that the standard epistemological topics that show up within theology are relatively easy to identify. We are all familiar with debates within theology in and around, say, natural theology, divine revelation, the nature and function of scripture, religious experience, and the rationality of Christian belief. However, there is a readiness in some circles to reduce this wealth of material to a discussion of the epistemic status of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. The crucial problem here is that composing the list of what constitutes the epistemology of theology proper is like watching an amateur musician playing an accordion: it expands and contracts without much rhyme or reason. Consequently, we intend to track the desiderata our intuitions pick out as broadly relevant to the epistemology of theology.

In this regard, we can legitimately begin to classify this material as best as we know how, starting with conventional wisdom (in both philosophy and theology) and with what comes naturally to us. In time we will be able to see whether we can improve on our initial efforts. Certainly we can hope to introduce some order into our initial efforts at providing a systematic map of the terrain. Even then we should relax. The aim is not to introduce some kind of rigid system, imposed on the data. Instead, the aim is to make progress in the epistemology of theology and to find ways to teach it that will be fruitful and liberating to those puzzled by epistemological issues. Order is important if we are to achieve this or that end; but it remains here a means to the ends of better understanding and better teaching.

## The Scope and Structure of the Volume

The *Handbook* is divided into four parts. Part I focuses on some of the epistemic concepts that have been traditionally employed in theology, such as knowledge of God (Ch. 1), revelation and scripture (Ch. 2), reason and faith (Ch.3), experience (Ch. 4), and tradition (Ch. 8). However, it also includes concepts that have not received sufficient epistemogical attention in theology, such as saints (Ch. 5), authority (Chs 6 and 10), ecclesial practices (Ch. 9), the inner witness of the Spirit (Ch. 7), spiritual formation, and discernment (Ch. 10). Part II takes up some concepts that have received significant attention in contemporary epistemology and can be related to theology, such as understanding (Ch. 11), wisdom (Ch. 12), testimony (Ch. 13), virtue (Ch. 14), evidence (Ch. 15), foundationalism (Ch. 16), realism/anti-realism (Ch. 17), scepticism (Ch. 18), and disagreement (Ch. 19). Part III offers some samplings from the Christian tradition and accordingly seeks to unpack and develop the relevant epistemological issues and insights in these writers, as well as pointing out the challenges of connecting insights from contemporary epistemology with the subject of theology proper, namely, God (Chs 20–36). The aim here is not to offer comprehensive coverage of the Christian tradition. As a result, the samplings include Paul the Apostle (Ch. 20), Origen (Ch. 21), Augustine (Ch. 22), Maximus the Confessor (Ch. 23), Symeon the New Theologian (Ch. 24), Anselm (Ch. 25), Aquinas (Ch. 26), John Duns Scotus (Ch. 27), Richard Hooker (Ch. 28), Teresa of Ávila (Ch. 29), John Wesley (Ch. 30), Jonathan Edwards (Ch. 31), Friedrich Schleiermacher (Ch. 32), Søren Kierkegaard (Ch. 33), John Henry Newman (Ch. 34), Karl Barth (Ch. 35), and Hans Urs von Balthasar (Ch. 36). Part IV identifies five emerging areas that warrant further epistemological attention and development: liberation theology (Ch. 37), continental philosophy (Ch. 38), modern Orthodox writers (Ch. 39), feminism (Ch. 40), and Pentecostalism (Ch. 41).

The chapters in this volume explore how the various topics, figures, and emerging conversations can be reconceived and addressed in light of recent developments in epistemology. Along these lines, each chapter: (1) provides an analysis of the crucial moves, positions, and debates; (2) identifies and spells out the relevant epistemic considerations;

and (3) offers recommendations of how inquiry into the particular topic might more fruitfully be pursued. Though the *Handbook* is interested in the current fields of epistemology and theology, it is not a survey of modern theological and epistemological trends. Rather, the aim is to identify and spell out the relevant epistemic considerations for the theological topics at hand.

# Conclusion

We are convinced that the level of scholarly engagement within and around epistemology and theology has grown sufficiently to permit and justify a volume of this sort. In this respect, the volume seeks to match the best scholars in epistemology and theology with the subject matter in hand. However, no uniform epistemological and theological approaches are synonymous with the epistemology of theology. The volume, in fact, reflects a broad range of perspectives and methodological assumptions. The hope is that the intersection of these disciplines will prompt greater work on, attention to, and development of the relevant themes.

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# PART I

# EPISTEMIC CONCEPTS WITHIN THEOLOGY

## CHAPTER 1

# KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

JOHN GRECO

OLDER discussions in religious epistemology tended to focus on the *rationality* or *reasonableness* of religious belief (see Clifford 1999; James 1979; Plantinga 1983). Questions about our *knowledge* of God were more or less off the table. Today, however, a good many philosophers are happy to raise issues regarding our knowledge of God. In fact, questions about whether knowledge of God is possible, and about how knowledge of God is possible, have come to the fore. How did this happen? What accounts for this shift in focus? The answer, I will argue, has less to do with how philosophers have changed their thinking about God, and more to do with how they have changed their thinking about knowledge.

In this chapter I use the terms 'general epistemology' to denote theories of knowledge in general and 'religious epistemology' to denote theories of knowledge about God in particular. The term 'epistemology of theology' is used to designate the consideration of epistemological issues that arise in theology. Accordingly, questions about our knowledge of God are in the domains of both religious epistemology and the epistemology of theology.

The first section looks at four important trends in general epistemology and touches on how they are manifested in religious epistemology and the epistemology of theology. The second section looks more closely at some recent discussions regarding our knowledge of God and how they too reflect current trends in general epistemology. The upshot is that general epistemology has taken an 'externalist turn' in its thinking about knowledge and related issues, and that contemporary religious epistemology has followed suit in this respect. The third and final section considers how general epistemology has more recently taken a 'social turn', and argues that religious epistemology and the epistemology of theology might fruitfully follow general epistemology in this respect as well.

# RECENT TRENDS IN GENERAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Four trends in general epistemology are particularly important for understanding the current state of religious epistemology and the epistemology of theology, and especially discussions regarding our knowledge of God.

## Rejecting Narrow Foundationalism

First and foremost, the theory of knowledge in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has mounted a sustained critique against narrow foundationalism, a theory that tries to explain all knowledge in terms of a narrow range of sources. A different way to think about narrow foundationalism is in terms of evidence: the theory tries to explain all knowledge in terms of a narrow range of evidence, or kinds of evidence. For example, rationalist versions of foundationalism try to ground all knowledge in what is certain and indubitable. Empiricist versions try to ground all knowledge in what is immediately 'given' in experience. Contemporary epistemology now sees narrow foundationalism as a failed project. The essential problem is that it tries to explain too much with too little. That is, the theory tries to explain all of our knowledge in terms of too few sources of knowledge, too limited a variety of evidence.

One place this becomes evident is regarding our knowledge of persons. How is it that we know what other persons are thinking or feeling, or that they have minds at all? If we have a limited conception of the sources of knowledge, it will be very hard to say. We will be faced with the 'problem of other minds'. In effect, this is the problem of explaining how knowledge of persons is possible, but entirely in terms of what we can know from sensory experience, together with what we can infer from experience by means of sound reasoning. Contemporary epistemology rejects this as a pseudo-problem, an artefact of an outdated approach to knowledge, and to human cognition more generally. That 'one size fits all' (or 'a few sizes fit all') approach has now been updated by the cognitive sciences, with a view of human cognition that admits a rich variety of integrated modules or faculties, each with its own job to do in different domains of knowledge. In fact, even common-sense categories such as 'perception', 'memory', and 'reason' are now understood to be general and ham-fisted, as we now know that there are many varieties of each, none reducible to the other.

General epistemology has learned this lesson from the cognitive sciences and has accommodated it. Religious epistemology and the epistemology of theology have followed suit by rejecting outdated models of our knowledge of God. Most prominently, both now challenge the idea that our knowledge of God must be by means of 'proofs' or 'demonstrations', as if knowledge of God were akin to knowledge of mathematical theorems. On the contrary, contemporary religious epistemology takes seriously the idea that our knowledge of God is a kind of knowledge of persons. But in general, our knowledge of persons is by means of our interpersonal experience of them as well as by means of what they reveal about themselves with their own words and actions. Religious epistemology is nowadays interested in pursuing analogous models of our knowledge of a personal God.

## Rejecting Internalism

A second trend in general epistemology is to reject strong versions of 'internalism'. One important kind of internalism is 'level internalism'; the view that, in order to know, one must *know* that one knows. Or better: In order to know, one must be in a position to *explain how* one knows, where such explanation is itself grounded in knowledge. General epistemology now rejects level internalism, and for much the same reason that it rejects narrow foundationalism: the theory is too restrictive, making it impossible to explain the range of knowledge that we think we have.

One problem is that level internalism seems to require an infinite regress of increasingly complicated knowledge. Consider: if in order to know, I must know that I know, then it would seem that I must also know that I know that I know. Or if knowledge requires only that I be 'in a position' to know that I know, then it would seem that I must also be in a position to know that I know that I know, and so on, for increasingly complicated permutations. Assuming that human beings are in no such position, level internalism makes human knowledge in general impossible.

A second problem with level internalism is that it seems to overly intellectualize ordinary human knowers. For example, it requires that to know that *here is a hand* or *my friend is upset*, one must know *that* one knows and/or *how* one knows such things. But is that realistic? Cannot someone who has never thought about the latter, or who has no aptitude for thinking about such things, nevertheless know that here is a hand or that a friend is upset? Cannot a small child know such things, but without the theoretical sophistication that level internalism requires?

It would seem so. But then, what made level internalism attractive in the first place? One motivation for level internalism is a different kind of internalism, what we might call 'access internalism', and which is in turn closely related to narrow foundationalism. Access internalism is the position that, whatever grounds one's knowledge, it must be 'immediately' accessible to one; that is, it must be immediately knowable, or knowable 'by reflection alone'. For example, if your knowledge is based on a particular set of evidence, then that evidence must be immediately accessible to you. This is very close to classical foundationalism, which restricts the sources of knowledge to such things as a priori reason, conscious introspection, and what is 'given' in experience. But then, if the grounds of knowledge must always be available to the knower in this special way, then it makes sense to think that, whenever one knows, one is in a position to reflect on one's grounds, and thereby come to know that one knows.

Be that as it may, general epistemology now rejects access internalism about knowledge. It is now widely accepted that, whatever knowledge requires, it requires more than what is immediately accessible to the knower, or what is knowable by reflection alone. For example, it is widely accepted that knowledge requires appropriate causal contact with the object of knowledge. It also requires, or is widely taken to require, healthy cognitive functioning and an enabling cognitive environment. But none of these things are typically available in the way that access internalism requires. For example, I cannot typically know, just by reflecting on the question, that my cognitive functioning is healthy, or that environmental conditions are relevantly friendly. Going back to a previous point about over-intellectualizing, the typical knower does not typically even think about such things, much less know that they are in place (for extended discussions of problems with level internalism, see Alston 1980 and Van Cleve 1984; for discussions of access internalism, see Alston 1986 and Greco 2010: esp. ch. 3).

General epistemology, then, has embraced an 'externalist turn' in thinking about knowledge. How does this play out in religious epistemology and the epistemology of theology? One result is a decreased interest in the traditional arguments of natural theology. The traditional arguments and proofs might still have a place, but there is a general consensus that they are not the basis for ordinary beliefs about God, and hence not the basis for ordinary knowledge of God. In turn, there is now increased interest in how religious believers might come to know God through experience or revelation. Just as general epistemology has turned its attention to the actual grounds of 'ordinary' knowledge, and away from the rational reconstructions of philosophers, religious epistemology is now concerned with ordinary persons in the pew (or in prayer, or in distress, or in joy, or in service to others).

## Knowledge versus Understanding

A third trend in general epistemology is to make a clear distinction between knowledge and understanding. According to this way of thinking, there is an important difference between *knowing that* such-and-such is the case and *understanding why* or *how* such-and-such is the case. For example, it is one thing to know that a particular chemical is combustible, and another to understand why it is. One motivation for this trend is to mark a distinction between contemporary discussions of knowledge on the one hand, and ancient and medieval discussions of *episteme* and *scientia* on the other (see e.g. Hankinson 1995; and Stump 2003: esp. ch. 7). Thus Aquinas reserved the term *scientia* for something like 'scientific understanding', or understanding grounded in a particular kind of explanation. A second motivation is to recognize a plurality of epistemic goods or values within our contemporary categories. Thus we English speakers make distinctions between knowledge, rational belief, understanding, wisdom, and other epistemic goods as well.

One advantage of this, relevant to present purposes, is that the concept of knowledge does not have to do all the important epistemic work. In particular, knowledge and understanding can now come apart; in a given instance, we may concede that understanding is beyond our ken without thereby conceding that knowledge is as well (Greco

2010: esp. ch. 1). This is important in both religious epistemology and the epistemology of theology. There is now logical space for ordinary knowledge of God without philosophical or theological understanding. For example, one might know that God loves His people and wants His creation to flourish, but not understand how suffering is compatible with this. Such a position now becomes possible, if knowledge is not identified with understanding (or does not always require understanding). Moreover, the present approach returns natural theology to its traditional role; that of providing *scientia* (or understanding) as opposed to ordinary knowledge (cf. Wolterstorff 1986).

## Explanation versus Vindication

Traditionally, epistemology has been engaged in two projects. The 'Project of Explanation' is to explain what knowledge is. This is the project of Plato's *Theaetetus*, where Socrates asks, 'What is knowledge?' and 'How does knowledge differ from true opinion?' This kind of project seeks to show or prove that we do indeed have knowledge. It is closely associated with the Pyrrhonian sceptical tradition, which argues that the project cannot be successfully carried out. Alternatively, a fourth trend in contemporary epistemology is to embrace the first project and to reject the second. More strongly, the Project of Vindication is now viewed as importantly misguided, and perhaps even incoherent.

We will return to the Project of Vindication in the following section, and we will see in more detail why contemporary epistemology rejects it. For now, I will note how these different conceptions of epistemology's project entail different ways of proceeding in epistemology. If the project is vindication, then a major task of epistemology is to answer sceptical challenges. Moreover, the sceptic must be answered on her own terms, using only assumptions that the sceptic would allow. Anything less would be dialectically unsatisfactory, begging the very question at issue. If the project is explanation, however, then things change dramatically. Now the aim is not to establish (against the sceptic) that we have knowledge, but to explain (to ourselves) the difference between knowing and not knowing. It is also to consider how beings like us, in the circumstances we find ourselves, might achieve the sort of knowledge in question.

What this means for religious epistemology and the epistemology of theology is a retreat from apologetics. In older days, the task was to develop arguments in favour of God's existence, to answer objections against these, and to critique arguments against God's existence. The entire process was framed as a debate, with each side trying to prove its case against the other, using only premises that all could accept. This makes perfect sense if the project is vindication, but no sense at all if the project is explanation. Accordingly, present-day religious epistemology deals more in explanations than in proofs; that is, theories are put forward regarding what knowledge of God would require for beings like us, and models are put forward regarding how we might fulfil those requirements. If the project is successful, it explains how knowledge of

God might be possible for beings like us.[1] It does not establish that we do have knowledge of God, and certainly not by using premises that even a religious sceptic might accept.

## Contemporary Religious Epistemology: Themes and Influences

The first section described four trends in general epistemology, and touched upon how these are manifested in religious epistemology and the epistemology of theology. This section explores these trends in religious epistemology in more detail. The first subsection considers Alvin Plantinga's rejection of classical foundationalism and his explanation of religious knowledge in terms of proper function. Here we find a case study of the dialectic described above: older ideas about the nature and requirements of knowledge are rejected in favour of a different theory that explains how knowledge of God might be possible for beings like us. The second subsection considers a similar dialectic in William Alston's work. Specifically, Alston criticizes various traditional theories of perceptual knowledge on the grounds that they entail unacceptable sceptical results. If these theories were correct, the result would be that we lack perceptual knowledge of ordinary physical objects. Alston then defends a different theory of perceptual knowledge—one that explains how ordinary perceptual knowledge is possible, and that allows for perceptual knowledge of God as well. For somewhat complicated reasons, primarily rhetorical, Alston avoids speaking in terms of 'knowledge' of God. He frames his discussion, rather, in terms of 'epistemic justification', or the sort of justification that knowledge requires (see Alston 1983 and Alston 1991: 2, 70–1). Nevertheless, his discussion can easily be translated into talk about knowledge, and that is what I will do.

Plantinga and Alston offer theories of knowledge and perceptual knowledge that, together with some further assumptions about ourselves and the world, explain how knowledge of God might be possible for beings like us. But even if those explanations are acceptable as far as they go, one might still reject the claim that we do have knowledge of God. For one, there is plausibly good evidence *against* God's existence—evidence of evil and suffering, for example—that undermines or 'defeats' any would-be knowledge of God. The last subsection takes up this and some related objections.

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[1] The phrase 'might be possible' signals that two kinds of possibility are involved here. The first is epistemic: roughly, something is epistemically possible if it is consistent with what we know to be the case. The second is practical: roughly, something is practically possible if it could more or less easily be the case. The idea is that (a) knowledge of God requires conditions X, Y, and Z; and (b) for all we know (epistemic possibility), human beings can (practical possibility) fulfil those very conditions.

## The Evidentialist Objection, Classical Foundationalism, and Proper Function

Consider the evidentialist objection against religious belief, here formulated as an objection against knowledge of God, since that is our topic (the objection could also be formulated against the rationality of belief in God, or the reasonableness of belief in God; cf. Plantinga 1983, and Wolterstorff 1983).

*The Evidentialist Objection against Knowledge of God*

1. One can have knowledge of God only if one's beliefs about God are grounded in good evidence.
2. But there is no good evidence for God's existence, or for beliefs about God's properties, intentions, actions, etc.

Therefore,

3. No one has knowledge of God.

The evidentialist objection could be formulated in weaker terms. For example, it might claim that the *typical* believer does not have the required evidence, or that no one *nowadays* has such evidence, allowing for the possibility of knowledge of God in extraordinary circumstances. For present purposes, however, we may consider the objection as stated here.

One way to respond to the evidentialist objection is to challenge premise 2. The response of the natural theologian, for example, is to offer the requested evidence in terms of some proof or argument that God exists. Plantinga, however, challenges the second premise, pointing to what he sees as a long-standing theme in the Reformed tradition. According to that tradition, beliefs about God can be 'properly basic'; that is, believed without being grounded in further reasons or evidence, and properly so (Plantinga 1983). In later work, Plantinga cites both Calvin and Aquinas as endorsing this position (Plantinga 2000: 170–7).

> According to the [Aquinas/Calvin] model, this natural knowledge of God is not arrived at by inference or argument (for example, the famous theistic proofs of natural theology) but in a much more immediate way.… In this regard, the *sensus divinitatis* resembles perception, memory, and *a priori* belief.
>
> (Plantinga 2000: 175)

Here we have a substantive disagreement in religious epistemology: the evidentialist objector claims that knowledge of God requires good evidence, while Calvin and Aquinas disagree. Plantinga traces this disagreement to one in *general* epistemology: behind the evidentialist objection are substantive theses regarding which kinds of knowledge require further grounding and which do not. Consider: we cannot assume that *all* knowledge must be grounded in further reasons or evidence, on pain of an infinite regress. So why is it assumed that knowledge of God must always be grounded in further evidence? According to Plantinga, the evidentialist objection is rooted in 'classical foundationalism', a theory of knowledge that restricts the range of basic knowledge to (a) incorrigible beliefs about the contents of one's own mind, (b) simple and obvious truths known by a priori reason, and (c) what is immediately given in sensory experience. All other knowledge, according to this view, must be grounded in these foundations by means of sound reasoning. But now it is easy to see why the classical foundationalist requires evidence for knowledge of God: beliefs about God are neither incorrigible beliefs about the contents of one's mental states, simple truths knowable by a priori reason, nor immediately given in sensory experience. Accordingly, they must be grounded in such to qualify as knowledge.

As Plantinga points out, however, classical foundationalism has been roundly rejected by contemporary epistemology, and for very good reasons. It is a version of narrow foundationalism, which, as we have seen, is incapable of explaining the full range of ordinary knowledge that human beings are presumed to have. In this light, it is no surprise that the evidentialist objection draws a sceptical conclusion about knowledge of God—the objection is grounded in a theory of knowledge that entails far more general, and clearly objectionable, sceptical results.

Now suppose someone thinks that the more general scepticism is not in fact objectionable, and that therefore narrow foundationalism and the evidentialist objection should not be rejected on that account. Still, the objection would fail to show that there is any objection to knowledge of God *in particular*. Religious scepticism would be gained only at the cost of a far more general scepticism, and so nothing interesting will have been shown about religious belief per se.

In earlier work, Plantinga's conclusion was largely negative: we have no good reason for thinking that beliefs about God are not properly basic. Put differently, we have good reason to reject classical foundationalism, according to which knowledge of God cannot be basic, but neither have we seen good reason for thinking that knowledge of God *is* basic. In later work, Plantinga replaces classical foundationalism with his own proper function view of rationality and knowledge. Proper functionalism better accounts for the full range of knowledge that human beings are presumed to have. At the same time, it makes room for the possibility of knowledge of God, and even basic knowledge of God (Plantinga 2000).

Plantinga puts forward the following conditions for knowledge in general, here roughly stated:

> (PFK)
>
> *S* knows *p* only if (a) *p* is true, (b) *S*'s belief is the result of properly functioning cognitive faculties, (c) *S*'s faculties are operating in an appropriate environment, and (d) when functioning properly in an appropriate environment, *S*'s faculties reliably produce true beliefs rather than false beliefs (these conditions, adapted from Plantinga 2000, are necessary rather than sufficient conditions for knowledge. I state the conditions this way to avoid complicated issues about Gettier cases that need not concern us here).

*S*'s cognitive faculties are 'properly functioning' if they are functioning as they are designed to function. A theist can take the 'design' language literally, but non-theists also employ relevant notions of proper function and design, as when we say that a bird's wing, or a frog's perceptual system, is functioning as designed.

Plantinga's theory explains why various kinds of perception, memory, and reasoning produce knowledge and why various kinds of dysfunction undermine knowledge. It also explains how knowledge of God might be properly basic. Thus suppose that, along with the various cognitive faculties natural to human beings, we are endowed with a faculty for knowing God directly—in Calvin's language, a *sensus divinitatis*. If such a faculty yields beliefs about God when functioning properly in an appropriate environment, and if such functioning is reliable as well, then the resulting beliefs about God will qualify as knowledge according to the criteria put forward by PFK. Of course, Plantinga has done nothing to show that there *is* such a faculty natural to human beings, or that such a faculty functions properly and reliably in believers. But there are long-standing religious traditions that hold that this is the case. If those traditions are right, then knowledge of God can be basic, and is in fact natural to the human condition.

Putting aside the merits of Plantinga's approach, we may note that it inherits the four characteristics of contemporary epistemology reviewed above. Thus it rejects both narrow foundationalism and level internalism, and defends an externalist theory of knowledge, in this case proper functionalism. Moreover, the explicit task is to explain how knowledge of God might be possible rather than to establish that knowledge of God exists. In all these respects, then, Plantinga's approach in religious epistemology follows more general contemporary trends.

## Alston on Perceiving God

Suppose that human beings are indeed endowed with a *sensus divinitatis*, or a faculty for knowing God immediately. One way to think of such a faculty is as a kind of perception, as a way of directly *experiencing* God's presence, love, or activity in our lives. Many 'ordinary' believers take it for granted that they encounter God in this way, and it is this sort of experience that grounds much of ordinary religious belief. Alston develops a perceptual model of religious belief in impressive detail, and uses the model to show how perceptual knowledge of God might indeed be possible (see esp. Alston 1991). In doing so, Alston follows a dialectic similar to what we saw in Plantinga's work. Specifically, Alston's first task is to reject older theories as inadequate for explaining perceptual knowledge in general. Such theories make it impossible to know that *here is a hand*, or that other ordinary physical objects exist. He then puts forward a theory that better explains the ordinary perceptual knowledge that human beings are presumed to have, and that opens up the possibility of perceptual knowledge of God.

The approach to ordinary perceptual knowledge that Alston is most concerned to reject understands perception as an inferential process. Specifically, it sees perception as involving sensory states as evidence, from which the perceiver is to infer facts about physical objects and their properties. A common rubric for such an inference is inference to the best explanation; on the basis of being appeared to phenomenally in such-and-such a way, the perceiver infers that the best explanation for this is that things are in fact such-and-such a way. For example, on the basis of being appeared to in a particular way, involving characteristic smells, sights, and feelings of warmth, I infer that the best explanation for this is that I am sitting by a fire. If my evidence (the sensory appearances) and the inference are good enough, then this grounds perceptual knowledge that I am sitting by a fire.

This explanation of perceptual knowledge is immediately a bit awkward—certainly it does not *seem* that I am regularly running through arguments to the best explanation (or any other sort of argument, for that matter) as I perceive the world. In that sense, the theory is psychologically implausible. But the greater problem, Alston notes, is that the theory makes perceptual knowledge impossible. That is because there is simply no good inference from phenomenal appearances to beliefs about the physical world. As the history of philosophy has shown, attempts to reconstruct such an inference fail miserably (see Alston 1993; and Greco 2000).

The alternative is to embrace a non-inferential theory of perception and perceptual knowledge, one that rejects the idea that perception is a kind of reasoning, and that perceptual knowledge therefore requires some good inference from appearance to reality. This is the sort of theory that Alston develops. The main idea is that there are various kinds of 'doxastic practices', or ways of forming beliefs. Some of these involve inference or reasoning from prior premises, while others involve going directly from sensory experience to beliefs about the world.

> A doxastic practice can be thought of as a system or constellation of *dispositions* or habits … each of which yields a belief as output that is related in a certain way to an 'input'. The sense perceptual practice … is a constellation of habits of forming beliefs in a certain way on the basis of inputs that consist of sensory experiences.
>
> (Alston 1989: 5, emphasis in original; see also Alston 1991: 153)

What matters epistemically is that such practices are reliable; that is, that they reliably produce true beliefs of the relevant sort, in relevant circumstances. For example, my visual perception gives rise to knowledge if it reliably produces true beliefs about objects of perception. My short-term memory gives rise to knowledge if it reliably produces true beliefs about the not-too-distant past. A particular form of reasoning extends my knowledge if it reliably takes me from what I already know to what I infer on that basis. This is the rough picture. In reality, our doxastic practices are constituted by families of integrated dispositions, including dispositions for considering counterevidence, for engaging in further inquiry when needed, and for resolving cognitive conflict. But the main idea is before us: we have knowledge when our beliefs are produced by reliable cognitive practices, including perceptual practices of forming beliefs directly on the basis of experiential inputs. Again, the sense of 'directly' here is 'in a way that does not involve reasoning or inference'. Perception can be affected by background knowledge in other ways, but that point does not in itself give rise to sceptical problems.

Accordingly, Alston's view is clearly externalist: knowledge is grounded in doxastic practices that are in fact reliable, and there is no further requirement that one knows that one's doxastic practices are reliable. Moreover, if one does know that a doxastic practice is reliable, this will not be something that one knows by reflection alone, and so Alston clearly rejects both level internalism and access internalism. Alston's view is also anti-evidentialist in the same sense that Plantinga's is. If by 'evidence' we mean prior knowledge on the basis of which further knowledge is inferred, then for Alston as for Plantinga, not all knowledge requires evidence. Both Plantinga and Alston think that knowledge always requires *grounds*, but the idea is that not all grounds amount to evidence in the restricted sense considered above (see Plantinga 1983: 78–82; Plantinga 2000: 175–6; and Alston 1991: 81–8).

How does Alston's doxastic practice approach account for knowledge of God, and more specifically, perceptual knowledge of God? The application is straightforward. Just as we are disposed to form beliefs about physical objects directly on the basis of sensory experience, many people are disposed to form beliefs about God directly on the basis of religious experience. If that disposition is embedded in a reliable doxastic practice, and if the practice meets Alston's other conditions for knowledge-producing practices, then in Alston's theory this would yield perceptual knowledge of God.

And from Alston's point of view, this is quite possibly the case. Thus various religious traditions include doxastic practices involving religious experience. Moreover, these are typically integrated into broader doxastic practices, including practices for discerning error, considering counterevidence, resolving conflicts, etc. If such practices reliably produce true beliefs about God, then they will yield perceptual knowledge in just the way other perceptual practices do.

## Objections to Externalist Accounts

A number of objections have been raised against externalist theories of knowledge in general as well as against externalist accounts of our knowledge of God. Here I will focus on three.

### *What about Counterevidence?*

Suppose that Alston is correct in at least this much: Someone who is disposed to form religious beliefs directly on the basis of religious experience is reasonable in doing so, so long as she has no reason to doubt that her experience of God is reliable. However, the objection goes, the typical believer in typical circumstances *does* have reasons for doubting just that. For example, the world is full of terrible and seemingly pointless suffering. That is part of our experience, too, and that speaks directly *against* the existence of a powerful and loving God. In the language of contemporary epistemology, the evidence of suffering 'defeats' any would-be knowledge of God.

The issues raised by this objection are deep and complex, and much of contemporary religious epistemology is devoted to them. Here I can only sketch some of the most important responses.

First, many theists grant the point that the evidence of suffering, or other evidence against God's existence, can act so as to defeat prima facie grounds for knowledge of God. This merely reflects a familiar structure in epistemology: evidence or grounds that, in isolation, would be sufficient to support knowledge, is defeated or countered by additional relevant evidence. However, the first response goes, defeating evidence can itself be defeated. This too is a familiar fact about the structure of evidence.

How might evidence against God's existence be defeated? One common response invokes natural theology. Thus even if the arguments of natural theology do not ground ordinary knowledge of God, such arguments might be an effective means of neutralizing counterevidence, either by adding further support in favour of God's existence, or by explaining how God's existence is in fact compatible with the evidence of suffering.

A second way that evidence against God's existence might be defeated is by experience itself. Plantinga points out that this is common in cases of sensory perception. For example, suppose that I have good evidence, perhaps from the testimony of experts, that prickly pear cacti do not grow in the upper peninsula of Michigan. But suppose also that I am presently in the upper peninsula, and that I clearly see that there are prickly pear cacti growing here—they are right in front of me, in full view. Presumably, my perceptual experience might itself be sufficient to defeat my evidence against there being prickly pear cacti in the upper peninsula of Michigan. Likewise, the argument goes, my perception of God might be of a quality sufficient to defeat evidence I have against God's existence (Plantinga 2000: 367).

Finally, some philosophers have challenged the claim that the experience of suffering really is evidence against God's existence. A strong version of the challenge goes like this: Given the Christian world view, including the Christian story regarding the fall and salvation, one would expect there to be widespread suffering in the world. But if that is the case, then such suffering cannot count *against* that world view. A weaker version of the challenge goes like this: Given theistic assumptions about the nature of God, including God's infinite love and wisdom, we are in no position to judge whether the suffering we observe in the world is inconsistent with God's ultimate purposes. On the contrary, we should expect less insight into God's intentions and plans than a small child has regarding those of his parents (Alston 1996; Bergmann 2001; and Wykstra 1984). Put differently, we might know that God loves us, and also that there is terrible suffering in the world, without understanding how those two things are related or how they fit together into a good and coherent plan for us (for extended discussion of the problem of evil and the rationality of religious belief, see the papers in Howard-Snyder 1996).

## *Why Doesn't Everyone Have Knowledge of God?*

Here is another common objection: If God has designed us with a *sensus divinitatis*, or with the ability to experience God directly in perception, then why does not everyone have knowledge of God? Why is not belief in God more widespread? (see Schellenberg 1993).

One way to interpret this objection is as an instance of the former. That is, we might take the fact of 'divine hiddenness' to be evidence against God's existence, just as we might take the fact of suffering that way. In that case, it would seem that the same sorts of responses are available, for better or worse. Another way to take the objection, however, is as a call for further explanation. The idea is something like this: You (Plantinga and Alston, for example) have tried to explain how knowledge of God is possible, and you have put forward specific proposals for that. But now you have something else to explain! Specifically, why doesn't *everyone* have knowledge of God? On your model, how do you explain *unbelief*?

Some religious epistemologists have tried to provide the explanation. Plantinga, for example, refers to the fall and damaged cognitive capacities. In a pre-fallen state, Plantinga suggests, knowledge of God would be as clear and natural as our knowledge of physical objects—even more so. But presently our capacities for knowing God are more or less 'damaged', and hence our knowledge of God 'muffled and impaired' (Plantinga 2000: 214). Paul Moser pursues an importantly different strategy, focusing on the *kind* of evidence that knowledge of God would require. Specifically, knowledge of God requires a transformation of our wills: we must be 'willingly led by God' and 'obediently yield our wills' to God's authoritative call. Moser opposes this kind of authoritative and transformative evidence, received in the context of a personal relationship with God, to the 'spectator evidence' that we demand when we insist on knowing God on our own terms rather than His (Moser 2008). Eleonore Stump also explains divine hiddenness in terms of the kind of evidence that knowledge of God requires. On her account, knowledge of God comes via an interpersonal experience of Him in the context of a mutual loving relationship. Since God is both perfectly loving and omnipresent, this kind of experience is potentially available to all, so long as our intellect and will are in good order. 'If Paula wants God to be significantly present to her, what is needed to bring about what she wants depends only on her, on her being able and willing to share attention with God' (Stump 2010: 117).

In one way or another, all of these explanations trace unbelief to a flaw in the unbeliever, either cognitive or moral. But there is another kind of response available. One might insist that, in general, knowledge of persons is variously distributed. That is because, in general, persons choose to disclose themselves variously, and for various good reasons. Since knowledge of God is a kind of knowledge of persons, we should expect the same in this case as well (Greco 2008).

The objector might insist: 'But why does God not disclose Himself equally to all? You owe an explanation of that'. Here one might again try to offer an explanation, preferably in terms of assumptions that a theist already accepts. But one might also resist the call for further explanation, again insisting that knowledge can come without understanding. For example, I might know some secret that you have shared with me, without understanding why you have shared that secret with me and not with someone else.

### *How Do You Know that Your Faculties Are Functioning Properly, or that Your Perception Is Reliable?*

A common response to externalist theories is the following: Even if your theory is correct—even if, for example, knowledge is to be explained in terms of properly functioning cognitive faculties—how do you know that your cognitive faculties are functioning properly? Alternatively: Even if knowledge is to be explained in terms of reliable doxastic practices, how do you know that your perceptual practices *are* reliable?

One way to take these questions is as 'innocent', in which case they can be given a straightforward answer. For example, the proper functionalist can answer as follows: The way you know that your faculties are functioning properly is the same way you know anything else—by investigating the matter with properly functioning faculties. For example, if you want to know whether your visual perception is functioning properly, there are familiar ways of finding out.

A second way to take the questions is as 'loaded'. Unless you *do* know that your cognitive faculties are functioning properly, then you do not know anything else, either. And, you *do not* know any such thing. But this looks like level internalism (the position that knowing requires knowing that you know, or at least being in a position to know that you know). And level internalism, as we have seen, should be rejected. In any case, level internalism does not present a special problem for religious knowledge. On the contrary, it entails a thoroughly general scepticism.

A third way to take the questions is even stronger than this. It is an instance of the age-old Pyrrhonian Problematic, and closely associated with the Project of Vindication. Here the idea is this: You cannot really know, unless you can show that you know. Moreover, you must be able to show that you know in a way that does not beg the question at issue. For example, to show that you have knowledge of the physical world, you cannot presuppose that you already know things about the physical world, for example that your physical perception is reliable. Likewise, there is no way to show that you have knowledge of God, at least not without presupposing that very knowledge; that is, without presupposing all sorts of things about God's existence, God's nature, God's intentions for us, etc.

The first point to make here is that, on the present interpretation, the questions simply misunderstand what religious epistemology is trying to accomplish. As we have seen, the project is to explain how knowledge of God is possible, not to show that knowledge of God exists. Put differently, the religious epistemologist does not even try to answer the present challenge. However, this is not simply a failure of nerve. Rather, there is something deeply problematic with the challenge itself.

Here again, we can take the lesson from general epistemology. In that context, the Pyrrhonian challenge typically arises as a challenge to our knowledge of the external world. In this case, the challenge is to show that we have knowledge of the world, but without using any knowledge of the world to do so, including knowledge of how perception works, of perceptual conditions, of the laws of nature, etc. Let us agree that the challenge cannot be met, as is nowadays taken for granted. Certainly that does not reveal a flaw in our epistemic position. For example, it does not show that we *do not* have knowledge of the external world, or even that we lack understanding about how we have knowledge of the external world. On the contrary, it shows only that knowledge of the world requires particular sources, and is impossible if deprived of those sources. But on closer inspection, it is a platitude, and close to a tautology.

## New Directions: A Social Turn for Religious Epistemology and the Epistemology of Theology

More recently, general epistemology has taken a 'social turn' as well. There has been an explosion of interest in the social dimensions of knowledge, including how the knowledge of individuals depends in various ways on the knowledge, activities, and properties of groups. Several issues here have clear applications in religious epistemology and in the epistemology of theology (see e.g. Aquino 2004: esp. Ch. 4; Lamont 2009; and Zagzebski 2012).

For example, a central issue in contemporary social epistemology is whether there exists group knowledge that is irreducible to individual knowledge. Putting the question a different way: Is the primary seat of knowledge sometimes a social group rather than its individual members, so that the knowledge of individuals is in an important sense secondary or derivative? This question is of obvious interest in religious epistemology and in the epistemology of theology, where we might ask if the knowledge of individuals depends in a similar way on knowledge of the religious community, or church.

A second set of issues in social epistemology regards the nature and role of epistemic authority. For example, how are we to understand expertise in a domain, and under what conditions is expert knowledge transmitted to non-experts? Is epistemic authority always grounded in expertise, or can it be grounded in institutional or other social roles? For example, can knowledge be transmitted through a 'spokesperson', even if that person has no special expertise regarding the knowledge in question? Clearly, these questions will be of interest in religious epistemology and the epistemology of theology as well as in general epistemology.

The most discussed topic in contemporary social epistemology, however, is the epistemology of testimony. Here there are several related issues. First and foremost: Is testimonial knowledge merely an instance of some other familiar kind, for example inductive knowledge, or is testimonial knowledge irreducible to other kinds of knowledge, requiring its own special treatment? According to the former view, testimonial knowledge is grounded in observations regarding who tells the truth and who does not, about what sorts of subject matter, in what circumstances, etc. That is, we use the evidence of previous cases to infer whether in the next case a particular person can or cannot be trusted. A second approach, however, thinks that this gets the nature of testimonial knowledge badly wrong. In this latter view, there is something special going on in testimony; that is, there is something *epistemically* special going on, so that the evidence of testimony cannot be understood as just one more kind of inductive evidence.

One important way of characterizing this special role is to say that testimony *transmits* knowledge rather than *generates* it. Put differently, testimony does not function so as to produce knowledge for an individual, but so as to distribute knowledge among individuals. Of course, not just any testimonial exchange achieves this. Just as there are conditions required for the successful generation of knowledge, there are conditions required for its successful transmission. It is the task of anti-reductionist theories of testimonial knowledge to detail and explain what those conditions are.

In this regard, one approach seems especially promising. Namely, particular social norms, institutional rules, and other social structures serve to underwrite *reliable* testimonial exchanges; that is, they serve so as to insure both truthful testifiers and discriminating hearers. For example, there are social norms and institutional policies that govern doctor–patient communications. These function so as to shape the behaviour of both doctors and patients in ways that facilitate reliable exchanges of relevant information. Importantly, this happens in such a way that social structures shift the epistemic burdens away from the individuals involved. For example, a patient does not have to verify the expertise of her doctor in a given field—that is done by a designated accrediting agency. Likewise, doctors do not have to do their own research on treatment efficacy—they can consult professional journals. Having said that, neither doctor nor patient is relieved of all intellectual obligations—the patient still needs to be a responsible listener, and the doctor still needs to be an honest and informed speaker. The parameters regarding what this entails, in the relevant testimonial context, are also determined by relevant social norms.

Suppose that anti-reductionist approaches to testimonial knowledge are on the right track. This would have several important implications for religious epistemology. In the remainder of this chapter I will consider two cases: Hume's objections to beliefs about miracles, and the problem of religious diversity. I will then briefly take up the objection that the present approach to knowledge of God presents too rosy a picture.[2]

## Hume and Miracles

Consider Hume's famous argument regarding testimony about miracles (Hume 1993: Section 10). According to Hume, it is never reasonable to believe on the basis of testimonial evidence that a miracle has occurred. There has been much debate about how Hume's argument is supposed to go, but here is one reconstruction.

First, suppose we are presented with testimony that some apparent miracle has occurred—let's say that someone has risen from the dead. According to Hume, reasonableness requires that we weigh this testimonial evidence against whatever other evidence we have that the event in question did not occur. That is the first premise of the argument. But since the event in question is an apparent miracle, that guarantees that our evidence against its occurring will be very good indeed. Here is the argument for that: If the event in question appears to be a miracle, then it must conflict with an apparent law of nature. But nothing could appear to be a law of nature unless we have very good evidence for it—unless we have *excellent* evidence for it, in fact. That is the second premise: that our evidence against the apparent miracle occurring will always be excellent.

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[2] The following is adapted from Greco 2012; see also Greco 2009: 61–76; and Greco 2015.

Finally, Hume's third premise is that our evidence in favour of the event's occurring will always be less than excellent. That is because we already know that people often testify falsely about purported miracles occurring. Sometimes people lie, or are self-deceived, or just make a mistake. In any case, the track record is not very good. And in light of that track record, the testimonial evidence for the present case is not very good either. But now all Hume's premises are in place: Our testimonial evidence that an apparent miracle has occurred will never be as good as our evidence that it has not occurred. And this means we can never know on the basis of testimonial evidence that a miracle really has occurred.

It is plausible, however, that Hume's argument depends on a reductionist understanding of testimonial evidence. That is why he can say that our testimonial evidence that some miracle has occurred will always be inferior to our evidence that it has not—in comparing the evidence, he thinks he is comparing apples to apples. If the anti-reductionist is right, however, then it is no longer clear that our testimonial evidence in favour of a miracle's having occurred must always be inferior to our inductive evidence against this. That will depend on the quality of the testimonial transaction, constituted by the quality of the original source (perhaps the miracle was eyewitnessed by many) and the quality of the social relations underwriting the testimonial exchange (perhaps the exchange is between trusted friends, verified by reliable authorities, etc.). In fact, Hume cites a case involving such a verification process, but does not appreciate its social significance (see Hume 1993: Section 10). In any case, an anti-reductionist about testimony will be concerned with more than the inductive evidence available to the hearer. On the contrary, she will look at epistemically relevant characteristics of the testimonial exchange, including the social conditions that make the transaction possible and that underwrite whatever degree of reliability it has.

## The Problem of Religious Diversity

Stated very generally, the problem of religious diversity is this: The plurality of religious traditions, and the attending fact of conflicting religious beliefs among traditions, seems to undermine the epistemic standing of religious belief in general, including one's own (see, for example, Alston 1991: esp. Ch. 7; and Quinn and Meeker 2000). Here is one way that the general problem can arise.

First, I might reflect that it is merely a historical accident that I was born into one religious tradition rather than another, and therefore merely an accident that I received the testimony about religious matters that I did. Moreover, the religious beliefs I have now are largely influenced by my receiving the testimony that I did. If I had been born into a different tradition and received different testimony, then I would not have the same religious beliefs that I do now. But then it seems too much of an accident that I have the religious beliefs that I do. Even if I am lucky—even if I am born into the one true faith and I am handed down nothing but religious truths—it still seems just an accident that I am in that tradition and believe those truths. Let's call this the 'Problem of Accidental Belief'. The problem can be stated more formally as follows:

1. When one forms a true religious belief on the basis of testimony from within a tradition, it is just an accident (just a matter of luck) if one forms a true belief on the basis of this testimony rather than a false belief on the basis of different testimony. In particular, if one had been born into a different testimonial tradition, then one would have formed different religious beliefs on the basis of different testimony, but it is just a matter of luck that one was born into his or her religious tradition rather than another.

2. Knowledge cannot tolerate that sort of luck or accident.

Therefore,

3. Religious belief based on testimony from within a tradition cannot count as knowledge.

In an anti-reductionist approach to testimony, we may deny either premise 1 or premise 2 of the foregoing argument. Regarding premise 1, we may deny that when one receives testimony from within a tradition it is 'just an accident' or 'just a matter of luck' that one forms a true belief on the basis of that testimony. On the contrary, if the transaction in question constitutes an instance of knowledge transmission, it is underwritten by a reliable transmission of reliable information. That is, the transaction will involve knowledge on the part of the speaker, and then a reliable transmission of knowledge from speaker to hearer. Moreover, the latter will involve social relations designed for that purpose, and so, again, the hearer's believing the truth on the basis of the speaker's testimony will be no accident.

Alternatively, we may deny premise 2 of the argument. That is, we may acknowledge that true belief on the basis of testimony involves *some sort of luck*; specifically, it involves the luck of being born into a particular tradition, and of occupying a particular social location within that tradition. But we may deny that knowledge cannot tolerate that sort of luck or accident. On the contrary, that sort of social endowment enables testimonial knowledge as much as one's natural endowments enable knowledge through accurate perception and good reasoning.

## Too Rosy a Picture?

One might object that the present approach to testimonial evidence, and its application to religious knowledge in particular, paint too rosy a picture—that it makes knowledge of God too easy. But whether the picture does make knowledge of God easy, or whether it allows for testimonial knowledge of God at all, depends on the answers to some further questions.

First, it depends on the existence and extent of knowledge-generating sources. After all, knowledge cannot be transmitted from speaker to hearer if the speaker does not have knowledge in the first place. Accordingly, the present approach to testimony and knowledge of God depends on prior issues in religious epistemology; that is, issues regarding whether and how knowledge of God is generated.

But suppose we take it for granted that there are such generating sources, and that they are fairly widespread. For example, suppose we take it for granted that perceptual knowledge of God is fairly common. Questions still remain concerning the conditions for the successful transmission of that knowledge. What, in general, are the conditions for the successful transmission of knowledge within a testimonial tradition? And are those conditions met by religious traditions today?

These questions divide further. For we may ask: What are the conditions for successful *interpersonal* transmission? At the very least, those would seem to include personal expertise and interpersonal trust. What are the nature and conditions of these in general, and for religious knowledge in particular? What are the conditions for successful *institutional* transmission? At the very least, those would seem to include institutional expertise and institutional integrity. Put differently, the institutional transmission of knowledge requires institutional *authority*. What are the nature and conditions of these in general, and for religious knowledge in particular? These questions, as well as others, frame a research programme for a social religious epistemology, and for a social epistemology of theology more particularly.

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## CHAPTER 2

# REVELATION AND SCRIPTURE

SANDRA MENSSEN AND THOMAS D. SULLIVAN

## PRELIMINARIES

REVELATION unveils, discloses, uncovers (the Latin *revelare* means 'to remove the veil'). In this most general sense, music, art, events, and human persons can all reveal and be revealed. But in a theological context, a deity either does the revealing, or is what is revealed, or both; and in the volume at hand, with its focus on Christian theology, the deity is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Scripture is constituted by sacred texts (though the Latin *scriptura* means merely 'a writing, an inscription'), and we may take it to be writing sacred to Christian tradition: the Bible, comprising Hebrew scripture and the New Testament.

What is the relationship between revelation and scripture? Not all revelation is reducible to scripture, for God's fundamental revelation is in the person of Jesus Christ. And standardly, at least, the Bible is regarded as divinely *inspired* but not in its entirety *revealed*. Still, there is a close connection between the two concepts: Christian scripture records or reports God's revelation; it is *about* God's revelation. This 'aboutness' relationship is one-directional, and makes revelation ontologically prior—prior in the 'order of being'—to Christian scripture. There is prior revelation in propositions, and actions in the world, that are reflective of divine nature in relation to us. But it is through scripture, and through encounters with individuals inspired by scripture, that people today first typically meet the revelation of Christ. And so scripture (perhaps together with interpreting individuals or an interpreting church) has, at least usually, an *epistemic* priority or primacy with regard to revelation: it is prior in the 'order of knowing'. This epistemic priority does not mean that people today cannot meet the Son of God directly, but such direct encounters are usually preceded by and mediated through accounts of Christ from others (most often parents) and these accounts are rooted in Christian community and in the scriptures that help shape the community.

*Revelatory claims* are foundational to Christian community and scripture. In this essay we will use the notion of a revelatory claim to facilitate simultaneous treatment of the concepts of *revelation* and *scripture*. Let us regard a revelatory claim as any assertion that fits, or can be made to fit, the following form: *God revealed that p*, where *p* is propositional content, perhaps very complex content (this form could of course be made more detailed, with reference to an asserter, a recipient, a time of revelation, and a means of revelation). Matthew reports Peter as saying, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God', and Jesus responding, 'flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven' (Mt. 16:16). Matthew is asserting that *God revealed that Jesus is the Christ* to Peter.

The notion of a revelatory claim helpfully focuses our attention on the *propositional content* of Christian revelation. The days of common dismissal of the existence or significance of 'propositional' revelation are past, and with good reason: '*that* Christ died for our sins, … *that* he was buried, *that* he was raised on the third day'—all these propositions, and more, are asserted in Christian scripture (1 Cor. 15:3–5, emphasis added). The non-propositional revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ is more fundamental than the propositional revelation, but our epistemic access to revelation comes in very large part through access to the propositional content of revelatory claims recorded in scripture.

It is natural, and quite useful, to speak of revelatory claims tied to specific religious traditions. The *Christian* revelatory claim can be understood as the claim of the Christian community that God has revealed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God—along with the rest of the content of the Apostles' Creed and other creeds grounded in the propositional content of the four gospels.

With the aim of illuminating epistemic aspects of the ontologically prior concept of revelation, we will address three questions:

First, what general method can a non-believer use in attempting to assess the truth of the Christian revelatory claim? We should emphasize that although this question is framed in terms of the non-believer, we will argue that its answer ought to interest many believers. In sketching an answer to the question we will include specific scriptural references intended to help illustrate the epistemic priority of Christian scripture with regard to revelation—even for a non-believer.

Second, what *standard* must belief in the Christian revelatory claim meet in order for the belief to be justified or warranted? Answering this question will require distinguishing the epistemic situation of the non-believer from that of the believer.

Third, are epistemic standards in theology (with regard to revelation) different from epistemic standards elsewhere?

We will not try to survey the literature with regard to revelation, even in broad outline, or the entire matrix of relevant epistemic concepts, for two reasons. First, accounts already exist that include such discussion (see King 2012, and Forrest 2013). Second, writers who take up questions concerning revelation and the epistemology of religious belief employ key terms so differently that it is difficult in a brief chapter to clarify usage and still have room left to say something substantive. For example, discussions of the concept of divine revelation often begin by distinguishing between 'general' and 'special' revelation. General revelation is widely taken to be revelation through the natural or created order. But there is disagreement as to whether such revelation includes natural theology (see King 2012: 495, and Abraham 2006: 67 n.7). Special revelation is sometimes defined as revelation through intervention into the natural or created order, and sometimes as the unveiling of truths unavailable to reason in the created order (see Abraham 1982: 8 and Sullivan and Menssen 2010: 202). But these two definitions are not equivalent.

## WHAT GENERAL METHOD CAN A NON-BELIEVER USE IN ATTEMPTING TO ASSESS THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATORY CLAIM?

It is not necessary to articulate explicitly a method of assessment to make judgements about some revelatory claims: we reasonably reject the delusional claims of a Jim Jones or David Koresh without consciously following a method. However, investigators of revelatory claims, especially those of a rationalistic mindset, may well desire a specific method. We want here to lay out a general strategy that a non-Christian (indeed, a non-theist) can use to assess the truth of the Christian revelatory claim, and then explain how that approach can be brought to bear in assessing a range of data. Some may think that the method goes too far in the direction of trying to objectify an inherently subjective process, shot through with fears and hopes and leaps beyond the evidence. But recall that we are focused on the non-believer, who may be disinclined to do much leaping.

This method is not the one most often discussed in recent philosophical literature concerning assessment of religious claims. Much of that literature has, following Richard Swinburne, been devoted to ways in which Bayesian reasoning can be employed to assess the probability of religious claims. Bayes's theorem, however, constitutes a highly technical form of reasoning that will appeal only to a small number of inquirers. Furthermore, even the experts report that the approach is plagued by problems. Bayesian reasoning works well to answer certain questions regarding highly controlled situations, such as what the likelihood is that the next card to be drawn from a standard fifty-two-card deck will be red (given information about past draws). But the theorem's application is problematic in less well-defined settings. That is partly because in more complex settings it is difficult to determine the values that need to be fed in at *multiple* points in Bayes's theorem (see Menssen and Sullivan 2007: 173–9). Additionally, there are concerns about the appropriateness of using Bayes's theorem to handle claims about causality—and of course causal claims are central both to science and religion.

However, *inference to the best explanation* is an alternative to Bayesian reasoning. We all employ this common-sense form of reasoning in some fashion, even if the label is unfamiliar. The basic idea is that if a particular hypothesis explains the facts better than a competing hypothesis, then the initial hypothesis has an epistemic advantage; and sometimes the best explanation seems good enough that we may justifiably infer that it is *probably true*. What is the best explanation of the fact that half the teacakes you left cooling on the counter are gone and your young nephew has crumbs all over his mouth and shirt? The hypothesis that your nephew ate the teacakes is powerfully attractive. What is the best explanation of the fact that the gospels claim that Jesus Christ rose from the dead? The hypothesis that Jesus actually did rise from the dead is unlikely initially to strike the non-believer as a powerfully attractive explanation, but it may seem correct once additional data are brought into the picture.

There are, of course, close connections between Bayesian reasoning and inference to the best explanation, though exactly what these connections entail is somewhat controversial. Nevertheless, systematic use of one does not preclude systematic use of the other. For example, Swinburne, the philosopher most associated these days with using Bayesian argumentation to support religious belief, employs inference to the best explanation informally to establish some of his hypotheses concerning religion (see Swinburne 2010).

Here is one possible argument frame for inference to the best explanation (it is tricky to state the form with precision, as a review of literature will reveal; we will skip over the difficulties here):

1. If a hypothesis sufficiently approximates an ideal explanation of an adequate range of data (which includes approximating it better than any other hypothesis does), then the hypothesis is probably or approximately true.
2. The hypothesis h-1 sufficiently approximates an ideal explanation of d, an adequate range of data.
3. So, h-1 is probably or approximately true.

This argument frame makes use of the Aristotelian notion of 'ideal explanation'. In an ideal explanation the form of the explanation is valid, the premises are true, the explanation cites a causal property or properties precisely in virtue of which the effect ensues, and the explanation bottoms on fundamental substances and properties (including powers), and on the exercise of such. Ideal explanation is a tall order, and cannot actually be realized. What we get are approximations to the ideal—explanations that approach it to greater or lesser degrees. But perfect friendship and ideal health are also unrealizable, and nevertheless friendships and healthy people exist. So do excellent explanations.

What data is the hypothesis that the Christian revelatory claim is true supposed to explain? The amount of data is vast. The data include facts established by scripture scholars concerning, for instance, composition and development of the gospel stories. They encompass broader historical facts, including ones about the growth and development of the Christian community. They also include facts established by science, such as boundary conditions for the existence of the universe. They include miracle claims and claims to mystical, ecstatic experience of the divine (the *claims* are a matter of fact;

whether the claims are true is disputed). The hypothesis must also be able to countenance facts about the reach and character of suffering, despair, and wickedness, as well as myriad apparent inconsistencies in scripture, apparent errors in dogma, and incontestable deficiencies in human messengers proclaiming the gospel.

The data encompass too what we might call *putative* facts, which cannot be regarded as definitely established, as givens—but which nevertheless figure in explanation. The case for the facts is *established by* their explanation. For instance, you might find it bizarre to think that the universe was once packed into an infinitely dense point—until an explanation is produced of how that could be. In this example you initially doubt the alleged fact and find it odd; but doubt is overcome. There are other examples of putative facts where one initially is inclined to accept the fact, is drawn to it—and would accept it *if only* an explanation of how it could be true were available. We might call this subclass of putative facts 'CUE-facts', which are Conditional Upon Explanation (see Menssen and Sullivan 2007). Perhaps you are strongly inclined to think that your child grows, gets taller, over time, while remaining the same person. But you have no solution to the philosophical puzzles such changes generate, and so (unduly influenced by your reading in philosophy) you reject the phenomenon that seems to be before your eyes—until you study Aristotle's concept of prime matter and see its explanatory power.

Both sorts of putative facts play an important role in comprehensive assessment of the Christian revelatory claim. Consider some religious examples.

The creation narratives in Genesis tell us that humans have a special place in the universe. Science once agreed, but in our post-Copernican era this is hardly a given; indeed, more than one Nobel Laureate in science has cited this particular teaching in Genesis as an example of how science *conflicts* with religion. The vastness of the universe and the indisputable fact that the Earth is not its centre may make it embarrassing to suppose humans occupy a special place. But you may be persuaded that the supposition is correct by explanations of how it could be the case. The explanations might come partly from science: these days fine-tuning arguments suggest that the magnitude of the universe may actually be necessary for humans to exist at all. The degree of precision required in the boundary conditions of the universe is mind-boggling. Explanations might also come from outside science: one might speculate that God could want to provide for his children a vast environment for the exercise of cognitive powers that image the infinite Creator, and furthermore that the specialness of the human race does not preclude there being other special races, yet to be encountered by us.

From the Ten Commandments to the Love Precepts in the Christian gospels ('Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind'; 'Love your neighbour as yourself'; Mt. 22:37–9), scripture contains divine commands and presumes that we may choose to follow them or not. The claim that humans have libertarian freedom—the freedom to do otherwise than we in fact do—is a CUE-fact. Most of us are powerfully attracted to the claim. Still, if naturalism is true then libertarian freedom is illusory. The only way of explaining the existence of libertarian freedom is through a non-naturalistic perspective according to which we are not merely matter in motion, but instead *agents* with immaterial minds or souls (what alternative hypothesis could explain our being able to do otherwise than we do?). The inconsistency between naturalism and libertarian freedom is a hard truth for naturalistic (non-theistic) philosophers. It has plunged some into depression. Others, for instance John Searle, report being unable to shake off their psychological sense of libertarian freedom despite their clear recognition that the naturalism they embrace entails such freedom does not exist (Searle 1984: Ch. 6). But if the Christian revelatory claim is true, then we have an explanation of the reality of libertarian freedom.

In short, there are *no limits* to the sorts of facts or data that may be brought into the picture; even putative facts may count. A believer might see this as a triumph. Our pattern for inference to the best explanation requires merely an 'adequate' range of data; what could be better than data without limit? However, the inquiring non-believer is unlikely to celebrate. How is the unwieldy mass of data supposed to be organized for review—how is a case to be built? Furthermore, data may support more than one revelatory claim; and the larger the data pool, the more problematic this seems to be. Christianity is not the only religion to hold that humans have a special place in the universe or that we have libertarian freedom. How can an inquirer investigate competing revelatory claims? Thus an inquirer is faced with two (connected) problems: the problem of the vastness of the data, and the problem of multiple or competing revelatory claims that result in an underdetermined case for Christianity.

To comprehend the vast amount of data, one needs *organizing frameworks*. The content of the Christian revelatory claim provides frameworks (with aids to interpretation) into which the explanatory data of most interest to an inquirer can be fitted. At least three kinds of frameworks, keys to interpreting and classifying the data, exist within the Christian tradition. First are *historical narratives*, especially scriptural narratives. These pick out certain historical events as important and help us interpret surrounding occurrences. The exodus of the Hebrews and their entry to the Promised Land, for instance, will be key to understanding the Christian eschatological vision. A second gives us *storylines for handling personal data*. The parables of the New Testament point us to our own weaknesses and vices (and these defects are most certainly part of the data that the Christian revelatory claim purports to explain). Third are *frameworks that provide explanatory first principles*, frameworks that explicate a doctrine in terms of its foundational theses. Aquinas's work is illustrative. His *Summa Theologiae* is not part of the Christian revelatory claim per se, but this masterwork can help us understand the content of the claim. It does that by displaying philosophical foundations. So, for instance, the gospel of Matthew tells us that the Love Precepts are fundamental; and Aquinas gives a philosophical account of how these Precepts underlie the older law of Moses.

What of the problem of multiple or competing revelatory claims? Multiple claims are not a *theoretical* bar to inquiry. It seems unlikely that God would have vouchsafed a revelation only to one people, and Christianity holds that he revealed 'at sundry times and in diverse manners' (Heb. 1:1–3). And difference does not entail contradiction: two different revelatory claims might both be true. Leading revelatory claims overlap very considerably (Jesus was a Jew), and it is not a theoretical drawback to an inquirer trying to assess the truth of the Christian revelatory claim that, for instance, evidence favouring libertarian freedom also helps support alternative revelatory claims. Of course, there are differences among the major revealed religions, but they can be overstated. Putative contradictions may be only apparent, and even where there are genuine contradictions, the disputed propositions may not be of the essence. And the *practical* problems for an inquirer not sure where to start can be handled. It makes good sense to start with what is most attractive or most interesting—either with a very broad claim such as canonical Christian theism, or a somewhat more specific claim such as the Roman Catholic claim, or an even more focused claim such as the contention that Jesus Christ rose from the dead (though if the focus is too narrow one risks missing much relevant evidence).

An attempt to assess the Christian revelatory claim by constructing an overarching inference to the best explanation of a wide range of data—the sort of data just enumerated—may take many years. One is comparing extremely broad explanatory hypotheses: a revelatory claim, on the one hand (with an embedded assumption about the truth of theism), and on the other hand, quite possibly, atheistic naturalism. But the years that must be devoted to the enterprise may *already* have largely been accumulated at the point an agnostic inquirer makes a conscious decision to undertake explicit comparison. That is because the organizing frameworks provided by major revelatory claims help one reclassify data already in possession, so certain key facts stand out. This sort of thing happens all the time in non-religious contexts. Think of the Socratic dialogues: Socrates 'helps' his interlocutors remember things they already know; with his organizing guidance, they draw conclusions *inconsistent* with what they have explicitly held. Much of philosophy is a matter of reworking and recombining what one already knows. In assessment of revelatory claims, the same point holds. Consider, for instance, the story of David and Bathsheba, as reported in Samuel. David, desiring Bathsheba, sends her husband Uriah to the battlefront, and once Uriah has been killed, David takes Bathsheba. The prophet Nathan tells David a parable, allowing David to see the awfulness of what he has done. David knew the relevant facts before Nathan spoke, but did not connect the dots: Nathan's parable shows David the significance of what he already knows. And along with New Testament parables, it may dramatically display for contemporary readers the poverty of their own selves, and the need to drink from a deeper well.

Organizing frameworks can speed things up in another way too: they show us *where to look* for additional relevant data. Once Mendeleev devised his famous periodic table (through framework-construction that involved study of the properties of the known chemical elements), he was able to predict new chemical elements. Again, the phenomenon appears in religious contexts. Consider, for instance, Christian teaching that temperance and chastity are virtues. The teaching, part of a larger framework that makes it clear *why* the temperate and chaste individual's self-control is valuable, may suggest that evidence for the truth of Christianity could be obtained by acting temperately and chastely. One is shown where to look. If one looks and decides to practise these virtues—even if only experimentally—additional data concerning the truth of the Christian revelatory claim may be discovered: self-control enlarges the scope of our vision and helps us love God and others.

As is clear from these examples, it is reasonable for an inquiring non-believer to take into account *personal* and *subjective* data. Living a chaste and temperate life may provide a subjective experience that helps one recognize the explanatory power of the Christian revelatory claim. So, too, may the experience of oppression, or of affliction: the sufferer sees something about the nature of reality that is relevant to assessing a religious world view. So does the sinner—a perversely reassuring point, perhaps, since while many of us lack chastity and temperance, and have not experienced severe oppression or affliction, all of us can acknowledge serious wrongdoing. Inquiring non-believers may wish to eschew the subjective, but that is impossible. There are few if any fields of inquiry in which subjective data are excluded. Certainly they are not excluded in science. Even in the reporting of data, 'hard' scientists, for instance, assess whether data fit theoretical projections in an 'extraordinarily good' fashion, or a 'very good' fashion, and so forth. Some subjective scientific judgements are reasonable; others are not. So it is also with respect to assessment of revelatory claims.

Given the subjectivity of some of the data, there are as many paths from non-belief to a bottom-line judgement concerning the truth of Christian revelation as there are inquiring non-believers. Notice one especially important fact about the available paths: they do *not* all involve initially establishing that God (probably) exists, and then proceeding to inquire into the truth of Christianity. The belief that there is a God may be reached *simultaneously* with the belief that Christianity is true. For example, one may establish the existence of Homer (by 'Homer' we mean 'a single individual primarily responsible for the *Iliad*') *together with* the truth of a complex explanatory hypothesis that embeds the claim that Homer exists. That is, arguably, how the existence of Homer was established: the content of the *Iliad*, its cohesiveness, the development and resolution of its main plot, the consistency and richness of its language, and more all pointed classicists to the conclusion that a single author was largely responsible for it, rather than a string of epic poets whose work was pieced together over the course of oral transmission of the poem. And one may establish the existence of God *together with* the truth of the Christian revelatory claim. The Christian claim, rooted in scripture, offers an explanatory hypothesis with content infinitely sweeter than the poetry of Homer.

The all-too-common insistence among philosophers that proper procedure requires establishing the likelihood of God's existence *prior* to testing revelatory claims cuts off a huge part of the data base relevant to arguing for theism (for a discussion of how 'standard natural theology' ignores the content of revelatory claims as important evidence for establishing the existence of God, see Menssen and Sullivan 2007: 45–51). For it is difficult to establish God's existence as likely unless some account can be given of the evils of the world, and the account Christianity has to offer is unimaginably richer than any non-religious account. The Christian account, accessed through scripture, is a story of love: of God's love for us and of what God has prepared for those who love him (which 'no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived', 1 Cor. 2:9). It is a story of the salvific value of suffering: our sufferings are caught up with Christ's, and are included in the sufferings adequate for the world's redemption, sufferings Christ has willed to make his own. God's love helps us both to love one another and the world, and together with the whole creation, groaning in travail, to find redemption (Rom. 8:19–23).

The scriptures give us the voice of God; before rendering a verdict on 'God in the dock' we should listen to the voice of the accused. There is no reason a non-believer cannot reflect on the content of the Christian revelatory claim and the tradition's greatest meditations on its content, entertaining the claim hypothetically, not as necessarily true, but as a serious option. Such a path of reflection may make it easier to reach the point of assent than the standard path that involves attempting to establish God's (likely) existence *before* moving on to putative revelation.

## What Standard Must Belief in the Christian Revelatory Claim Meet in Order for the Belief to Be Justified or Warranted?

From the perspective of the non-believer investigating matters in the way just described, when is belief in the Christian revelatory claim justified? It is justified when the case for the Christian revelatory claim is *likely* (*more probable than not*). In such a situation the case for the claim is *more credible* than the case for its contradictory.

For a claim to be likely, there needs to be a case *for* the claim that is better than any case *against* it. Of course, nobody can know the details of all the possible cases against a claim—but one may be able to say that whatever the details of some particular case against the claim, they cannot be persuasive. For instance, an investigator may at some point want to say: whatever the details of the naturalistic account of what we call 'free choice', the account should be rejected, because it will be inconsistent with libertarian freedom. Note that it may be possible to determine that there is 'a case' for the Christian revelatory claim stronger than any case against it without knowing *which* case is stronger (as a juror may determine that there is a good case for the accused's innocence without settling on a *particular* witness's alibi, given a range of alibis similar in substance but inconsistent in detail).

All this is not to say that such a case is *necessary* for belief, but merely that it is *sufficient*. For such a case to suffice it certainly is not necessary that a non-believer formally articulate the case. One need not use the language of 'inference to the best explanation', or speak in terms of rival hypotheses or data bases. Just as a person who has never heard of the *modus ponens* argument form may frequently make and accept arguments that fit the classic form, individuals who have never heard of the label 'inference to the best explanation' may make and accept arguments that do, in fact, conclude to the best explanation of a particular range of phenomena.

A case of this sort that can move a non-believer to belief can also provide all a *believer* needs with regard to epistemic credentials. *Many* believers, if asked to justify their position, will begin something like this:

> Nothing makes sense unless Christianity is true. I do not know why we humans are here or where we are going; indeed I do not know where anything has come from, why there is something rather than nothing. I cannot make sense of my awe when viewing the Dakota Badlands, or my deep sorrow before the Palestrina Pieta, or my joy when listening to Beethoven's 'Ode an die Freude', or my remorse over my wrongdoing, or even the wrongdoing itself.

This is an explicit appeal to inference to the best explanation, using a data base fuller than provided by natural theology alone—a data base that includes the content of revelatory claims. Accounts of this sort from believers—deeply explanatory accounts—will likely emphasize subjective and experiential factors. That does not make the accounts different in kind from accounts sought by inquiring non-believers, which, as noted, also necessarily include subjective elements.

And even if believers do not begin their answer with an appeal to the explanatory power of Christianity, they may move to it when pressed with objections. Perhaps an epistemic justification will begin by referring solely to a believer's specific experiences:

> Given the way I feel during prayer, or reading the gospels, I can no more believe Christianity is false than I can believe the sun will rise in the west.

And then the objection comes: 'But feelings are not a very reliable guide to truth—a mother may feel certain that her missing child is alive, while in fact the child is not'. And the response (after reflection) might be:

> But it is not just the feeling when I pray or read the gospels. It is how the prayer and the gospels connect with everything else: the quiet assurance I have, reverberating through the day, that all shall be well, and the way I see gospel lessons play out in the day's events and guide my decisions and strengthen my resolve—it is the way everything makes sense in one picture of the world, and nothing makes sense in the other.

That is an inference to the best explanation. And countless variations on this scenario—with regard to the initial justification, the objection, and the reply to the objection—will land us with a justifying explanation.

These accounts of how a believer might invoke inference to the best explanation may themselves suggest a deep problem with our earlier contention that if the Christian claim is more probable than not, then an inquirer or a believer is *justified* in accepting it. For the account in the preceding paragraph emphasizes the breadth and depth of the Christian world view: all is transformed. Accepting the Christian revelatory claim entails accepting a whole host of assertions about the nature of the world, and about our obligations, and about sources of authority with regard to obligations yet to be imagined. How can a belief of such enormity be justified by a *merely* probable case? A probable case is any case with a chance of success better than .5 (i.e. better than 50/50), perhaps only very slightly better. Is not that far too weak a threshold for belief? And to make things still worse, consider that *one* of our obligations, according to the Christian claim, is that we are to *wholeheartedly* believe, work to dispel doubts, be resolute in religious commitment. How can all of this possibly be justified by a case that is only a tiny bit better than 50/50? Is not a case closer to 100 per cent required before belief is appropriate? Despite all of this, nothing better than a case slightly stronger than 50/50 is required.

Alvin Plantinga has argued otherwise: 'if my only ground for Christian teaching is its probability with respect to K [background knowledge], and all I know about that probability is that it is greater than .5, then I cannot rationally *believe* that teaching' (Plantinga 2000: 274, emphasis in original). However, the argument rests on the observation that knowing that a coin is loaded (but not knowing how heavily it is loaded), and so knowing the probability that it will come up heads on the next toss is better than .5 (but not knowing how much better), does not make it reasonable to *believe* it will come up heads. But at best it shows that knowing the probability of a particular proposition is better than .5 does not *always* suffice for believing the proposition—the example does not show it *never* suffices.

Neither does our criticism of the argument show that a case better than .5 *does sometimes* suffice. So, why think that a case only slightly better than .5 underwrites belief in the Christian revelatory claim? In short, because the *content* of that claim makes it reasonable for the threshold to be found at the point where the case becomes slightly better than .5. Most notably, it is part of the content of the Christian revelatory claim that one has an *obligation* to act in certain ways. If one believes there is a better case for than against the Christian claim, then one presumably believes that there is a better case for than against the end of union with God being obligatory; and according to the content of Christian revelation, wholehearted, resolute belief is indispensable for achieving that end. And in general, if a person believes that there is a better case for than against some end being obligatory and some act being indispensable for achieving that end, then the act is obligatory for that person (see Sullivan 1993, and Menssen and Sullivan 2007, for extended development of these points).

Of course, part of what one must consider in assessing whether the case for the Christian revelatory claim is better than .5 is the injunction to believe resolutely. If this command were immoral or unreasonable, the case for the Christian claim would not exceed .5, and indeed, there would be cause to *reject* the claim. But why think the requirement of resolute belief is immoral or unreasonable? A central teaching of Christian revelation is that we are obliged to seek union with God. Wholehearted belief is a means to that obligatory end. What would be immoral or unreasonable about a command to seek this means to an end? There may be more than one reason why this means would be chosen. Of course the obvious reason is that what is sought is *closeness* to God; cleaving through resolute belief provides that. But notice too that resolute belief strengthens bonds among persons. We work together to plumb the mysteries of creation and the Creator. 'For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face' (1 Cor. 13:12). Concerted activity to apprehend truth is a great good, and itself conducive to union with God.

Granting that a case only slightly better than .5 might justify *belief*, could it ever justify *knowledge*? Perhaps not, at least given ordinary understandings of 'knowledge' (there is of course disagreement among philosophers about the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge, and how the term is to be defined). But the Christian creeds begin '*I believe …*' ('*Credo …*'), not '*I know*'. We are asked to have faith, and to the extent we have faith, we lack knowledge, in the standard or scientific sense of 'knowledge'.

There may be a very different approach by which some believers rightly claim *knowledge* of Christianity, a path that does not involve anything like inference to the best explanation. Plantinga depicts a believer who finds deep within his or her epistemic foundations a 'basic belief' in God and Christianity. In much the same way that we simply find ourselves perceiving trees, or remembering what we had for breakfast, Plantinga says, some people find themselves believing that God exists and that Christ died for our sins. Their belief may be *occasioned* by particular circumstances (such as the starry heavens above), but is not typically *inferred* from those circumstances, or from any data set. Plantinga suggests we all have a disposition to form theistic beliefs in certain circumstances: we have a *sensus divinitatis* (sense of divinity) which, together with the Holy Spirit, gives us knowledge both of God and of Christianity. Our sense of the divine does not always work properly, though, and when it fails to operate as it was designed to, our access to these truths is blocked.

In this approach, Christian belief—for some individuals—is warranted without evidence (assuming, of course, that Christianity is *true*; an assumption that will be rejected by many). We might say that the belief is grounded but not on evidence. Following Plantinga, *warrant* may be taken to be something (e.g. proper functioning of cognitive faculties, together with an ability to defend the beliefs they generate against known objections) such that when it is adjoined to a true belief, there is knowledge. Unlike many, Plantinga and the Reformed epistemologists do not use 'warranted' as a synonym for 'justified'. In their view religious belief may be *warranted* despite not being probable relative to the evidence, though it may not in that circumstance be *justified* in what one could call an 'evidentialist' sense.

Even in this approach, however, it is recognized that for believers to be within their epistemic rights in claiming *knowledge*, sometimes some of them must be able to reply to objections. In constructing such replies it can be useful to consider evidence available through inference to the best explanation. We earlier suggested that an 'organizing framework' may help a person understand the significance of information already in possession, and show where to look to find additional relevant data. Take a further example. At one point in Plato's *Republic* (368d), Socrates tells Glaucon and Adeimantus that if they first study justice writ large, justice in the city, they will understand its structure, and so know where to look in the individual soul to discern what makes a *person* just. Socrates alludes to an apparently well-known experiment in perception in which a person is trying to discern from a distance small letters that are just too far away to be seen. If larger versions of the letters are placed above the small letters, then the viewer will be able to make the small letters out (that the viewer is really *seeing* the small letters can be verified by trying to fool the viewer with the wrong letters). Believers *shown where to look* can find the justifications that are implicit in their belief structures, even if they would not have used the language, say, of inference to the best explanation.

Even if believers are not responding to critics, it may be natural and useful for them to weave evidential considerations into their thinking. William Abraham emphasizes the naturalness of this in his discussion of the role of the *oculus contemplationis* (the 'contemplative or spiritually discerning eye') in recognizing divine revelation. Most believers, Abraham suggests, find themselves with an awareness of God and God's voice; they need not be able to run through some complex probabilistic argument for the truth of theism and, eventually, of Christianity, to have knowledge of these truths. Still, the arguments can usefully be absorbed and, on occasion, deployed by many who have a basic perception of God at work in the world. We see the deep structure of the theist's intellectual position 'as positing an initial *oculus contemplationis* complemented by an illative sense [a capacity to frame and test hypotheses informally] that does indeed form complex explanatory theories that are supported by the same experiences that trigger our initial beliefs about God' (Abraham, 2006: 72).

It may also aid the non-believer to reflect on considerations Plantinga and Abraham detail. Persons who feel some pull towards religion but are convinced that one cannot rationally believe in God without good propositional evidence (which they judge to be lacking), or who think that there are serious objections to the Christian revelatory claim that are not objections to the *truth* of the claim (e.g. objections based on Freudian or Marxist analyses), will be among those who profit from reading the Reformed epistemologists. And many agnostic inquirers will benefit from pondering Abraham's 'conversion narrative'—his account of one (fictional) individual's journey towards and across the threshold of Christian revelation. That account draws on extensive preceding analysis of the epistemic situation of the believer (Abraham 2006: 112–28).

## Are Epistemic Standards in Theology (with Regard to Revelation) Different from Epistemic Standards Elsewhere?

As this volume's editors have noted, Aristotle famously said that not all sciences admit of the same degree of clarity and precision: standards are relative to the discipline (*EN* 1.3 in Crisp 2000: 5). We have just suggested that a default standard one may keep in mind in considering whether belief in the Christian revelatory claim is justified (the standard that there is a case *for* better than any case *against*) is neither lower nor higher than standards applicable elsewhere. We want in closing to say a bit more about the general question of whether epistemic standards in theology are different than they are elsewhere.

There is one important sense in which epistemic standards must be the same in theology as they are in every other area. Aristotle thought epistemic justification should fit the subject, but held that the basic principles of argumentation apply across all disciplines: the rules of the syllogism are invariable. That is a point that may be reassuring to a sceptical inquirer, a stanchion to cling to. Theologians and religious believers cannot give up on rules of logic.

Can one go so far as to agree with David Tracy's classic statement that the same 'autonomous judgment, critical reflection and properly sceptical hard-mindedness' suitable in other fields of inquiry is suitable also in the area of theology? (Tracy 1975: 7; quoted by Abraham 2006: 54, who notes that Tracy may have revised his view in later work). The answer is yes—so long as one makes appropriate distinctions.

If recognizing the importance of 'autonomous judgement' in theology involves simply recognizing that each inquirer (as well as each theologian or philosopher undertaking meta-inquiry) must make his or her own bottom-line assessment of the relative strength of the case for and the case against a particular revelatory claim, then autonomous judgement can certainly be allowed—indeed, insisted upon. However, if committing to 'autonomous judgement' involves resolving *prior to consideration of the evidence* not to accept any thesis that entails there may be such a thing as divine authority, since such authority is perceived as threatening self-government, then 'autonomous judgement' in theology should be rejected. But such a prior resolve hardly seems in line with openness to evidence, and such openness presumably is an element of the 'critical reflection' Tracy endorses. Indeed, celebrating the *autonomy* of judgement could be a prelude to recognizing the value of the ineliminable *subjectivity* of inquiry into revelatory claims.

If 'critical reflection' in theology means insisting that *theologians* or *philosophers* discussing epistemic standards consider objections to their professional positions, and weigh arguments and counterarguments, that is fine. If it means that every religious believer is required to subject his or her views to the same kinds of criticism applied by scholars, it is not fine. We do not expect most people to scrutinize their belief in libertarian free will with the eye of a philosophical critic before they are entitled to that belief, and we should not expect most people to subject their religious convictions to acids of criticism before they are entitled to hold them. If Christianity is true, believers may well be blessed with a *sensus divinitatis* or *oculus contemplationis*.

A '*properly* sceptical hard-mindedness' is certainly appropriate to theological discussion of revelation. But everything hangs on what counts as proper. We want scepticism proper to critical reflection, but we do not want Pyrrhonic scepticism.

In general, we must *distinguish* senses of terms that are disputed. Consensus or at least rapprochement may be closer than it appears. This is especially important when trying to map new territory such as the epistemology of theology. Defining precisely, distinguishing, and arguing: these are instruments philosophers hone. So *theology needs philosophy*.

Wonderful though philosophy is, some of its common practices can mislead those who explore revelation, and even if they do not mislead, they will not suffice. We hope this chapter shows that it is possible to be too enamoured of certain widely accepted philosophical protocols. It is a mistake to adhere to some of the common protocols regarding methods of investigating revelatory claims: the standard philosophical approach (through natural theology) that denies access to the data of revelation unnecessarily circumscribes the evidence. It is perfectly appropriate for both non-believer and believer to include the content of Christianity in an explanatory data base, and may be essential, since that content addresses the problem of evil as well as difficulties connected with 'resolute belief'. Philosophy can show this much. But while philosophy may help us find a glass through which the divine can be glimpsed—or, if we already have such a glass, help clear a little fog from it—philosophy stops short. *Philosophy needs theology*. Those who would see God face-to-face must ponder the message of Christ, revealed in large part through scripture—and the best theologians will help us do it.

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## CHAPTER 3

# REASON AND FAITH

LARA BUCHAK

## Introduction

Faith is a central attitude in Christian religious practice. The Christian typically sees it as her moral duty to have one or more of the following: faith in God; faith that God exists; faith that God is good; faith in the elements of various creeds; and faith that what God tells her is true. *The problem of faith and reason* is the problem of reconciling religious faith with the standards for our belief-forming practices in general ('ordinary epistemic standards').

In order to see whether and when faith can be reconciled with ordinary epistemic standards, we first need to know what faith is. In this chapter, I will primarily examine views of propositional faith: faith that *p*. And I will primarily be concerned with the epistemology of such faith: what cognitive attitudes such faith requires, what epistemic norms govern these attitudes, and whether Christian faith can ever adhere to them.

There are two tasks for an account of rational faith. The first is to argue that it fits the 'data' we have about faith: descriptions of faith in scripture, intuitions about cases of having or lacking faith, linguistic practice regarding the term 'faith', the function of faith in religious and interpersonal practice, and feelings and attitudes associated with faith. The second task is to show that faith in the relevant 'faith propositions' (the propositions that the Christian ought to have faith in) can sometimes meet our epistemic standards.

However, there is widespread disagreement both about what our ordinary epistemic standards actually are, and whether, according to these standards, belief in the faith propositions is rational. (I will use 'rational' to mean 'meets the epistemic standards', whether these standards are a matter of justification, warrant, intellectual virtue, reasonableness, or something else.) For our purposes, there are two important axes along which epistemologists disagree. The first is whether truth-directed reasons are enough for a rational subject to believe (or reject) the faith propositions. Some hold that arguments and evidence are enough to show that God exists, or that God does not exist; while others hold that arguments and evidence still leave open the question of God's existence. The second is whether rational beliefs can ever be sensitive to reasons that are non-truth-directed. Some hold that what an agent should believe is fully determined by truth-directed reasons. Others hold that non-truth-directed reasons can rationally make a difference to what a subject believes—or, indeed, *must* rationally make a difference to what a subject believes—when truth-directed reasons leave it underdetermined what she should believe.

Accounts of faith can be divided into three types, based on the cognitive attitude that faith requires. Some hold that faith that *p* requires belief that *p*, and I will call these doxastic accounts. Others hold that faith only requires a weaker belief-like attitude, such as acceptance, and I will call these weakly doxastic accounts. Finally, some accounts hold that the primary attitude involved in faith is something entirely different, such as hope or commitment to an action—I will call these non-doxastic or practical accounts. (Many accounts of all three types include the additional condition that faith requires a pro-attitude, such as desire, towards the truth of the proposition in question.)

Our taxonomy will be organized both according to the type of cognitive attitude that faith requires, and to the two epistemic axes mentioned. Before we begin, three caveats. First, I am primarily examining accounts of Christian faith, although most of these accounts are meant to apply to other cases of religious faith and cases of mundane faith as well. Second, any taxonomy will be imperfect, and several of these accounts have multiple possible interpretations; nonetheless, I hope to capture the essential divisions between the accounts. Finally, I am concentrating here on the rationality of faith in a static rather than dynamic sense: what it is to have faith in a proposition at a particular time, and how such faith is arrived at or justified at that time. Many accounts of faith add that faith is robust in the face of counterevidence, and although I will mention this feature in conjunction with several accounts, I do not have space to discuss it fully.

## DOXASTIC ACCOUNTS OF FAITH: TRUTH-DIRECTED EPISTEMOLOGIES

We will first examine doxastic accounts of faith that all share a particular view in epistemology: that truth-directed reasons are conclusive in determining that a subject should believe (or not believe) the faith propositions.

### Faith as Belief in Faith Propositions

The first of these views is fairly widespread: faith is just belief in the relevant faith propositions. Swinburne (1981) says that although the Fathers of the Council of Trent developed this view—he calls it the Thomistic view—it is widespread among Catholics, Protestants, and many outside Christianity. (One could add that faith is belief plus something else. For example, what Swinburne calls the Lutheran view holds that faith also requires that one trust God and commit oneself to God, though since my concern is in distinguishing views of faith by what they require epistemically, I will not distinguish these two views here.) That this view is widespread is illustrated by the fact that it is sometimes left implicit: some authors defend faith that God exists by arguing that it is rational to *believe* that God exists, without explicitly defining faith; and others reject faith that God exists by arguing that it is irrational to believe that God exists.

What theistic authors who hold that faith is just belief in faith propositions have in common is that they think all or some of us have good, objective epistemic reasons to believe in God. For example, they may hold that natural theology is successful and therefore that we can reason to God's existence on the basis of what we know about the world around us. Or they may hold that for those people who have had religious experiences, these experiences make it rational for their possessor to believe in God. Alternatively, atheistic authors who hold that faith is just belief in faith propositions may hold that no one has conclusive truth-directed reasons to believe in God—that is, that faith is always irrational.

## Faith as Belief Formed via Testimony

Other accounts of faith that adhere to truth-directed epistemologies hold that faith is belief that is formed in a particular way, or that has a particular basis. One such account holds that faith is belief on the basis of testimony: one has faith in a person if one relies on that person's testimony in forming beliefs, and one has faith in a proposition if one believes that proposition on the basis of someone else's testimony. So, to have faith that *p* is to believe that *p* on the basis of testimony—as Anscombe puts it, to believe *someone* that *p*. Proponents of this account include, historically, Augustine (1892) and Locke (1996), and more recently, Anscombe (1979, 2008), Zagzebski (2012), and Dougherty (2014); furthermore, Aquinas (1946) discusses at least two senses of faith, one of which is deference to testimony. Versions of this account can be more or less restrictive about what counts as faith. They can hold that the testimony itself must come from God (or be believed to come from God) in order for the resultant attitude to properly count as faith; or alternatively that believing based on testimony in general always counts as faith. Similarly, they can hold that the attitude is properly called faith only if the content of the attitude—the propositions in which one has faith—is religious in nature; or they can be more permissive.

According to these accounts, whether a particular instance of faith is rational will hinge on the circumstances under which it is rational to accept testimony more generally. In particular, it will hinge on whether belief formed via testimony is just an application of ordinary epistemic practices, with testimony playing no special role, or, if testimony is to be treated differently than other sources of belief, whether testimony is superior, inferior, or on a par with ordinary reasoning. Hume (1999) takes the view that believing via testimony is largely an application of our ordinary reasoning process (induction): in our experience, testimony is generally reliable, though it ought to be rejected when we have better (inductive) reason to suppose that it is false. Locke and Augustine distinguish between the epistemic status of testimony and other kinds of reasoning. Locke takes the view that it is better to understand truths through use of our own reason than to take someone else's word for it, and that deferring to others' opinions often prevents us from employing our own reason, so that testimony is an inferior source of knowledge. By contrast, Augustine holds that we might need to defer to someone else's opinion in order to understand a truth (we need to 'believe in order to understand'), so that testimony is often a necessary source of knowledge.

## Faith as Belief Formed via a Sense of the Divine

A different view according to which faith is belief formed in a particular way claims that faith is belief formed on the basis of an innate faculty or 'divine sense'. To hold that such faith is rational is to hold that belief in religious propositions needs no articulable, publicly accessible justification. This position is associated historicly with Calvin (1995) and contemporarily with Plantinga (1983, 2000).

To understand Plantinga's view, it is helpful to understand his epistemology. He is a foundationalist and an externalist. Foundationalists distinguish between basic beliefs—those that need no further justification, as long as there are no positive reasons to reject them or to worry about their source—and non-basic beliefs—those that are justified by other beliefs, in a chain which can eventually be traced to beliefs in the foundation. For example, beliefs formed on the basis of perception (e.g. that the cat is in front of me) may be basic and thus in need of no further justification, and beliefs inferred from this belief (e.g. that the cat is not in the garden) are justified insofar as they are correctly inferred from other justified beliefs. Externalists hold that what *makes* a belief justified can be external to the subject—some fact about the world or about the subject vis-à-vis the world, rather than some fact only about the subject himself. For example, what makes my basic belief justified is that my perceptual faculty is working correctly, regardless of whether I have good evidence for this fact or know precisely how perception works.

Foundationalists must answer the question of which beliefs are basic and why. Plantinga holds that a belief is basic if it was produced by a belief-forming process functioning properly in the environment in which it was designed to function. For example, vision is a reliable belief-forming process that generally functions properly in our world. Following Calvin, Plantinga claims that if the Christian story is true, then God has implanted in us a very particular reliable belief-forming process: a 'sense of the divine', which, when activated in the right circumstances—for example when we see something of great beauty—produces beliefs such as 'God loves me' and 'God created this'. These beliefs are thus basic and justified, and from them we can infer other propositions, such as that God exists.

Whether Plantinga is correct that beliefs formed in this way are rational depends on a number of factors. First, it depends on whether we indeed have a sense of the divine, which in turn depends on whether God in fact exists—Plantinga explicitly notes that the *rationality* of belief in God, according to his picture, depends on whether this belief is *true*, but argues that this poses no special problem. Second, it depends on whether we accept Plantinga's foundationalist, externalist epistemology. Finally, even if we do accept his epistemology, then although religious beliefs are basic, it will still be irrational to hold onto them if we have positive reason to think these beliefs are false ('defeaters') or special reason to think that the faculty that produced them was working incorrectly at the time ('underminers')—so the rationality of religious beliefs may still be undermined by, for example, the problem of evil or the problem of disagreement.

### Faith as Believing in the Absence of Sufficient Justification

There is one final category of truth-directed epistemologists who have a doxastic view of faith: those who hold that truth-directed reasons are insufficient for belief in the faith propositions, and hold that faith, then, is a matter of believing in the faith propositions against what the evidence dictates or in the absence of sufficient justification. Or, if the account is generalized to include mundane cases of faith, they hold that faith is generally a matter of believing a proposition in the absence of sufficient evidence. In other words, they hold that faith fills the gap between evidence and belief, but that this gap ought not to be filled.

Many who hold this view of religious faith are detractors of religion—it seems to be a common view among the 'New Atheists'. However, one can hold this view and also hold that religious (or mundane) faith can be virtuous in some respects, if one thinks that faith should not be judged primarily by epistemic standards but instead by the standards of morality or practical rationality. For example, one might hold that it is noble or morally virtuous to believe in the innocence of one's friend despite all evidence to the contrary, even though doing so is not epistemically virtuous. Similarly, one might hold that there is something good about believing in God, even when it is epistemically irrational to do so.

### Epistemological Issues

Since all of these accounts hold that truth-directed reasons alone dictate the doxastic attitude an individual should take towards the faith propositions, the primary epistemological questions for these accounts concern what these reasons actually say about the faith propositions. This is not the place to wade into this debate, so I refer the reader to the myriad discussions of reasons and arguments for God's existence, reasons and arguments against, and reasons that we ought to suspend judgement.

## Doxastic Accounts of Faith: Broader Epistemologies

Some accounts hold that faith that *p* requires belief that *p*, but that rational belief is sometimes responsive to non-truth-directed reasons when truth-directed reasons are not decisive—and, in particular, that this holds when it comes to belief in faith propositions. These accounts locate faith as the attitude that fills the gap between evidence and religious belief. To show that such faith is rational, they must explain why and how non-truth-directed reasons can rationally affect what an individual believes. They must also explain how non-truth-directed reasons can psychologically cause belief, since our ordinary picture of belief is one in which beliefs are resistant to being formed for reasons other than that we think them true.

## Faith as Belief Fostered by the Will

We begin with Aquinas's (1946) second account of faith. (As mentioned, Aquinas gives an account of at least two senses of faith, the other being belief on the basis of testimony.) In order to understand how Aquinas thinks about religious beliefs, we must understand how he thinks beliefs are formed and justified generally (I follow Stump's 2003a, 2003b interpretation). To understand this, it is important to see how Aquinas understands the will. The will is not an entity that actively makes choices, but rather an inclination for goodness: when the will apprehends something as good, the will cannot help but will it, just as a plant cannot help but be drawn to the sunlight. Thus, a person acts 'under the guise of the good'—he does things that he sees as good under some description—and a person cannot help but see happiness in this life and God in the next life as good.

Aquinas also discusses the relationship between the intellect and the will. The intellect is typically what judges a course of action as good, and it then presents this course of action to the will as good. The will can direct the intellect—direct it to adopt or reject a belief, or to think about certain things or avoid thinking about others—but it cannot direct the intellect against the way it normally works—it cannot, for example, direct the intellect to adopt a belief it knows to be false. Given this picture, belief can be brought about in two different ways: if epistemic considerations are decisive, belief can be brought about by the intellect alone; and if they are not, belief can be brought about by considerations that move the will. Belief brought about by the will is psychologically possible because the will produces beliefs in a way that is not directly under our control, and because the will can only work in accordance with the intellect.

Aquinas does hold that there is epistemic justification for the belief that God exists. However, he also holds that many people are not in a position to know this, and thus believe by faith instead. To have faith is to assent to the faith propositions in the second way mentioned above: a person who has faith assents to these propositions on the basis of considerations that move the will, namely that believing these propositions presents itself to the will as good. In addition, a person who has *formed* or *salvific* faith (the faith of the Christian, rather than the faith of the devils) must be moved to assent to the propositions by the right motivations—by a hunger for God's goodness, rather than by a love of power.

Aquinas additionally argues that faith is rational, but not because believing propositions on the basis of the will rather than the intellect is generally rational, but because the faith propositions themselves entail that believing in this way is in fact truth-directed—his argument for this is complex, and rests on the connection between being and goodness. (For this reason, we might place this account of faith in the previous section, since it endorses believing for what turn out to be truth-directed reasons, but since the path is roundabout, I place it here.) Although non-truth-directed reasons arising from the will do not generally make a belief rational, in the particular case of the faith propositions, the reasons arising from the will *are* (surprisingly) truth-directed.

## Faith as Doxastic Venture

*Doxastic venture* views hold that the will can take over when reason is not decisive, but they typically see the will as a mechanism for choice rather than a passive response to goodness. Perhaps the most famous doxastic venture view is that of Pascal (1910) in his famous Wager. Pascal argues that if reason cannot decide the question of whether God exists, then we are *rationally required*—from the point of view of practical rationality—to believe in God, since a decision-theoretic analysis shows that believing in God is better than not believing in God or remaining agnostic. Pascal gives three separate decision-theoretic arguments, but the most famous one says that since believing in God yields 'an infinity of an infinitely happy life' if God in fact exists, then believing in God has a higher expected value (infinite expected value) than not doing so (finite expected value). Belief in God is also morally permissible, since by believing, one will attain moral virtues, whether or not God exists.

Pascal appears to hold that belief in God on the basis of the pragmatic considerations adduced by the Wager is psychologically possible. This is because he seems to see unbelief as primarily caused by sin: in response to the worry that we cannot believe in God at will, he exhorts us to have Masses said and take holy water so that we may remove unbelief. Adams (1987a) makes a similar point about an individual involved in the sin of unbelief (lacking faith), though he concentrates on Christians who resist believing and acting on some truth that God is telling them. He argues that unbelief is a sin precisely because this resistance is the result of an emotional failing, for example, wanting control. So, for Pascal and Adams, rather than faith filling the gap between evidence and belief, a lack of faith creates a gap where there need not be one. Thus, the will is primarily involved in *removing irrational unbelief*. This explains both why belief in God is psychologically possible and why it is epistemically rational.

James (2005) holds that the will can play a role in belief when epistemic considerations are not decisive, and that it is the believer's situation that makes relying on the will rational. By the will, James primarily means non-epistemic considerations that influence belief (our 'passional nature'), though he clarifies that these considerations come *before* the intellect has examined all of the evidence—this is why taking these considerations into account is psychologically possible. When epistemic considerations are not decisive, and when the decision of whether to believe something or not is *genuine*—one cannot avoid choosing between two or more hypotheses that are each plausible and there is a great deal at stake in the choice—then the will not only may, but *must* decide whether to believe something, believe its negation, or suspend judgement. One particular consideration that James singles out as not determined by reason alone is how much evidence one needs to believe a proposition, which he holds is determined by how our passional nature weighs the goal of knowing truth against the goal of avoiding error. A focus of James's argument is that there are practical consequences associated with failing to believe something that is true, just as there are practical consequences associated with believing something that is false.

Bishop (2007) takes James's insights, plus the idea that faith essentially involves a risky act, as his jumping-off point in his doxastic venture view of faith. When we lack adequate evidential support for both a proposition and its negation, we are sometimes entitled nonetheless to believe the proposition and to give it full weight in our practical reasoning. When these three conditions hold—we recognize that we lack adequate evidential support for a proposition, we give the proposition full weight in our practical reasoning, and we do so while believing the proposition to be true—then we have faith in the proposition.

Bishop's epistemology largely follows James's. One is epistemically entitled (though not required) to have faith that *p* if—and because—whether to take *p* as true in one's practical reasoning is essentially undecidable by the evidence alone *and* whether to take *p* as true in one's practical reasoning is a genuine choice (in James's sense). Bishop calls principles about what counts as evidence *framing principles*, and he calls framing principles that concern the most fundamental evidential connections *highest-order* framing principles. Framing principles present genuine options, and highest-order framing principles are essentially undecidable by the evidence alone. Furthermore, some of the faith propositions are highest-order framing principles. (To see this, notice that how to take the claims of the Bible into account in forming our beliefs about the world depends on whether we think these claims were inspired by God.) Thus, faith in these propositions meets the criteria for epistemically rational faith.

A final view in this vein comes from a popular interpretation of Kierkegaard's (1983) pseudonym Johannes de Silentio: religious faith requires believing something that is irrational or absurd, and yet religious faith is the highest possible thing a person can aspire to. Similarly for Kierkegaard's (1992) pseudonym Johannes Climacus, as Adams (1987b) understands him: faith requires total commitment to a belief, the kind of commitment that could not in principle be arrived at rationally via evidence, precisely because reason always leaves room for some doubt or future revision. (Whether faith counts as merely filling the gaps in the evidence, or believing something that positively ought to be disbelieved, depends on how we are to interpret the status of the objective evidence.) Here, it is not that faith ends up epistemically justified, but that epistemic justification is the wrong criterion to apply to faith, since faith is something higher.

Bishop's model captures the idea that faith involves a risk. Since the person who has faith that *p* gives *p* full weight in his practical reasoning while recognizing that *p* is not fully supported by evidence, he will act in a way that seems less than fully justified. Similarly, even though other doxastic venture models might not explicitly mention action, insofar as every belief one holds has the potential to issue in action (see

Clifford 2005), they seem to recommend acting in a way that one is not (at least initially) fully confident in on the basis of epistemic reasons alone. And, since action is evaluable according to practical and moral standards, we can, in addition to asking whether having faith is epistemically rational, ask whether and when having faith is practically rational or morally laudable.

## Faith and Theory Choice

Authors who take scientific inquiry as a model for individual epistemology echo Bishop's point that highest-order framing principles are generally underdetermined by evidence. Van Fraassen (2002) and Murphy (1990) each draw on an account of how science progresses—Kuhn's (1970) account and Lakatos's (1970) account, respectively—to explain why individuals might believe faith propositions. Van Fraassen's aim is not to defend religious beliefs, so his mention of them is more in passing, but Murphy's aim *is* to defend religious beliefs. (Neither explicitly gives an account of faith, but since both give accounts of why we might rationally believe faith propositions without decisive evidence, they are worth including in this discussion.)

Kuhn and Lakatos reject the naïve view that science is a discipline in which progress is primarily linear and a growing body of knowledge is continually added to. Instead, they hold that scientific progress is a battle between successive (Kuhn) or simultaneous (Lakatos) paradigms. A paradigm involves high-level concepts, laws, theories, and instrumentation, on the basis of which data are interpreted; in addition, what count as data are partially determined by which paradigm one accepts. According to Kuhn, which paradigm a scientist accepts is a matter of non-evidential factors: scientists may begin in one paradigm as a matter of historical accident, maintain it dogmatically, and change paradigms when a crisis arises (for example, an inability to solve a persistent problem). Lakatos sees science as a series of competing rather than successive paradigms, and holds that there are often objective epistemic reasons for choosing one paradigm over another; namely that one is more *progressive*: it has a better record of modifying itself in response to challenges in such a way that it predicts novel facts.

Van Fraassen and Murphy take the view that individual belief-formation is analogous to science, and they hold that faith propositions are components of high-level research programmes that one might adopt or reject. Van Fraassen holds that one will change 'individual' paradigms (undergo a conversion to or away from religious beliefs) through experiencing a crisis in one's current beliefs, where emotion is the primary factor that resolves the crisis. Murphy holds that such a change can be driven more by epistemic factors: one changes individual paradigms when evidence shows that one's current paradigm is less progressive than an alternative. (Notice that since one always has some reason to continue working in one's current paradigm rather than switching, these views provide a ready-made answer to why religious beliefs, once adopted, should be somewhat robust in the face of counterevidence.)

In combination with Bishop's view that religious faith involves taking a stance on highest-order framing principles, we can use these authors' insights to fill in particular reasons that one would adopt the faith propositions. On van Fraassen's account, the religious person might find herself adopting faith because of an emotional upheaval brought about by incongruences and failures in her previous belief system; and on Murphy's account, the religious person might hold the view that a particular set of faith propositions constitutes a progressive research programme. When these form the core of her thinking, she tends to do well at understanding the world around her and predicting how things will go, and when they do not, her understanding of the world around her is filled with ad hoc hypotheses and not much predictive power.

## Epistemological Issues

The accounts of faith in this section will appeal to those who hold that although evidence for religious propositions is not decisive, believing religious propositions can nonetheless be rational. However, these accounts raise additional questions.

First, can it be epistemically permissible to believe a proposition partially for non-truth-directed reasons? If we think that belief aims at truth, then why should we allow belief to be influenced by something other than truth? To put the worry metaphorically: if responding to evidential considerations gets us closer to the goal of attaining truth, does responding to non-evidential considerations at best move us orthogonally to the goal, and at worst move us away from the goal? These accounts also raise an additional question: is it even *possible* to believe for reasons one recognizes to be non-truth-directed? (Can we intentionally move in any other direction than towards the goal?)

The accounts that we have seen answer these questions in different ways. Aquinas holds that we can be pulled by both our intellect and our will, and that being so pulled is largely a matter of how these two faculties function rather than conscious choice. Our intellect can only pull us towards the goal, and while our will is not so restricted, in the particular case of belief in God, it turns out that the pull that we feel towards believing the faith propositions is actually a pull towards truth. Pascal and Adams hold that we can only indirectly be moved by our will—by non-truth-directed reasons—but that in the case of the faith propositions, to subject ourselves to the indirect influence of our wills is to release ourselves from the forces that pull us away from truth.

James, Bishop, van Fraassen, and Murphy all hold that the picture of responding to evidence as responding only to truth-directed reasons is mistaken, and that if we are to believe anything at all, we must adopt certain principles before forming any conclusions about what the evidence suggests. Thus, we must first locate ourselves somewhere and then try to aim at truth from that point. While what determines our location can be more or less intentional—it could be a historical accident, a matter of passion or emotion, or a conscious move from a different starting point—we cannot help but start from a location if we are going to engage in the project of truth-seeking in the first place. So, there will be nothing epistemically objectionable about starting from some particular point, although given this fact, the choice of starting points is also open to moral and prudential evaluation. Murphy's extra-evidential factor is perhaps the only factor that turns out to be, in the end, epistemic, though even on her view one still needs to start somewhere.

So, the distinction that Aquinas, Pascal, and Adams draw between religious faith and wishful thinking is that faith allows us to have what are in fact justified religious beliefs; and the distinction that James, Bishop, van Fraassen, and Murphy draw between the two is that religious beliefs are of the high-level type that evidence cannot, or cannot directly, settle.

## Weakly Doxastic Accounts of Faith

Weakly doxastic accounts hold that faith requires adopting a belief-like attitude—a positive cognitive stance—but an attitude that is less committal than belief. This is sometimes put by saying that faith is a *sub-doxastic venture*. These accounts are partially motivated by the thought that though belief is not under direct voluntary control, closely related cognitive attitudes are. Since an individual's evidence may not decide whether the faith propositions are true, and belief that *p* cannot coexist with belief that the evidence does not decide whether *p*, but faith requires a positive cognitive stance towards the faith propositions, then the required cognitive stance must not be belief. All of the accounts in this section identify the cognitive stance that faith requires to be something weaker than belief; however, all but Schellenberg's also hold that if the individual *does* believe, then that is sufficient for the 'cognitive stance' requirement of the account: what is required for faith is that one have belief *or* the weaker attitude identified.

Golding (1990), and Buckareff (2005) following him, note that being religious entails pursuing a good relationship with God. Thus, the required cognitive stance for faith is *pragmatic assumption* that God exists for the purpose of pursuing a good relationship with God. Pragmatically assuming that *p* is only rational if one believes that there is at least some chance that *p* (presumably, a very low epistemic bar to meet in the case of pragmatically assuming that God exists). In addition, as long as the goal is not immoral, then pragmatically assuming that *p* for the sake of some goal is morally permissible; and as long as pragmatically assuming that *p* is instrumental in achieving the desired goal, then doing so is practically rational.

Alston (1996) identifies a slightly different attitude as the required cognitive stance for faith: Cohen's (1992) notion of *acceptance*. Acceptance differs from belief in two crucial respects: acceptance that *p* does not require that one have a high degree of felt certainty that *p*; and acceptance is under our direct voluntary control. Like belief that *p*, acceptance that *p* requires that one use *p* as a premise in theoretical and practical reasoning. Alston's full analysis of faith is that faith involves a weak epistemic position with respect to *p* (this may not be required, though it is a feature of central cases of faith), a pro-attitude towards *p* (e.g. one wants *p* to be true), and a cognitive attitude towards *p* which could either be belief that *p* or acceptance that *p*.

The cognitive stance that Schellenberg (2005, 2014) identifies is *imaginative assent*. One imaginatively assents to *p* if one deliberately represents the world to oneself as including the truth of *p*; if one intends to be mentally guided by this picture of the world on an ongoing basis; and if one follows through and is so guided. Faith that *p* requires that one have a pro-attitude towards *p*, that one does not believe not-*p*, and that one imaginatively assent to *p*. (For Schellenberg, faith that *p* is incompatible with belief that *p*.)

Howard-Snyder's (2013) account shares features with the above accounts, but takes a broader view about what the relevant cognitive stance is. He holds that faith that *p* requires a positive evaluation of *p*, a positive conative orientation towards *p*, a positive cognitive stance towards *p*, and resilience to new counterevidence to *p*. Also, for each of the first three elements, there is no single attitude that is required; for example, the positive cognitive stance can be belief that *p*, acceptance that *p*, or assumption that *p*.

All of the above, except for Schellenberg, hold that propositional faith can be realized in a number of different ways, since the cognitive stance involved in a particular case of faith can be belief or something weaker. Audi (2011), on the other hand, allows that a person with faith can either believe or take a weaker cognitive stance, but that these are two different kinds of propositional faith—doxastic faith and fiducial faith. Both require a positive evaluation of their object. Audi adds that faith tends to eliminate negative emotions such as fear.

It is easy to see how faith is epistemically permissible according to weakly doxastic accounts of faith, since these accounts do not require that one believe the propositions in question. And even though they require a positive cognitive attitude of some sort, the standards governing this attitude do not seem primarily to be epistemic in nature, save for the weak standard that the proposition must have some chance of being true, or alternatively that one does not believe its negation. However, we might hope to identify stronger epistemic standards concerning these attitudes, so that the norms governing them are not mostly practical or moral in nature. For example, is it not better to assume or accept, of two propositions, the one that is more likely to be true, given one's evidence? Might it be epistemically superior not to accept any propositions at all, if one can live one's epistemic life without doing so? Thus, the primary epistemological question for these accounts is what epistemic standards govern cognitive states such as pragmatic assumption, acceptance, or imaginative assent—and whether the faith propositions meet these standards, given any particular subject's evidence.

## Practical Accounts of Faith

Some authors hold that faith does not primarily involve a cognitive attitude at all, but rather involves a commitment, choice, or action. Faith, however, may rest on cognitive attitudes in the sense that it would be irrational or incoherent to have faith without some particular beliefs. Thus, some of these accounts give rise to an epistemological question of their own: even if faith does not require anything like belief, is it ever rational to have the beliefs that justify the attitude that faith does require?

## Faith as Acting without Believing

Pojman (1986) elucidates a view of faith as *profound hope*. Hope that *p* requires belief in the possibility of *p*; a lack of certainty that *p*; a desire for *p*; and a disposition to do what one can to bring about *p*. *Profound* hope requires a particularly intense desire for *p* and a willingness to take great risks in order to bring about *p*. Religious faith involves profound hope in the faith propositions.

This account shares some features in common with Swinburne's (1981) *pragmatist* faith, which consists in acting on the assumption that *p*, and doing so where one has good purposes. One can have such faith without believing that *p*. Another possible proponent of this view is Kierkegaard, if we read him as primarily emphasizing *action* rather than *belief*, as we do if we see de Silentio or Climacus as recommending a practical commitment to a proposition that outruns the evidence for that proposition—or a practical commitment even in the face of evidence that seems to tell decisively against that proposition. Along these lines, Cross (2003) holds that de Silentio's Abraham has faith precisely because although his evidence tells him that he certainly will have done grave wrong in the act he intends, he trusts that this will not be so, where this trust is a 'practical orientation towards the world' rather than a propositional attitude.

## Faith as Commitment without Further Evidence

A more recent proponent of a practical account of faith is Buchak (2012). She holds that a proposition is only a potential object of faith if the individual has a pro-attitude towards *p* and if the evidence is not enough to guarantee the truth of the proposition. Like some of the above authors, she holds that faith involves an element of risk: faith that *p* requires that one is willing to take risks on *p*—that one is willing to choose acts that do best if *p* is true over acts that do best if *p* is false. What is distinctive about her view is that faith that *p* requires that one commit to these acts without looking for further evidence in the matter of *p*—at least, without looking for evidence for the sole purpose of deciding what to do—and that one maintain one's commitment even in the face of new counterevidence. Thus, faith is a matter of stopping one's search for evidence and taking action.

Whether such faith is rational is primarily a matter of whether it is practically rational: whether stopping one's search for evidence and making a commitment (and sticking to a commitment in the face of counterevidence) is apt to get the agent what she desires. Buchak identifies three conditions that jointly entail that committing to a risky act on *p* without examining further evidence is superior to postponing one's commitment until more evidence comes in: the subject already has a lot of evidence in the matter of *p* and on its basis she is fairly confident that *p*; the subject believes that any evidence she might find will not conclusively tell against *p*; and postponing her commitment would be costly or she is risk-averse. (There may be other situations in which faith, in Buchak's sense, is rational.) Thus, faith is practically rational if these conditions are met.

The first two of these conditions concern the subject's beliefs and her evidence (actual or potential), so we can ask whether an epistemically rational subject can meet these conditions in the case of the faith propositions. (Whether closing inquiry itself is epistemically rational is beside the point, since the subject with faith is allowed to examine more evidence for the purposes of belief-formation, although if such evidence tells strongly against *p*, then faith that *p* might cease to be rational.) Buchak holds that these conditions will be met for some religious believers, but not all.

## Faith as Allegiance to an Ideal

The final account holds that faith is not a matter of having some attitude—cognitive or otherwise—towards a proposition. Dewey (1934) and, following him, Kvanvig (2013) hold that faith does not primarily concern one's attitude towards a proposition but rather towards an *ideal*. (Discussion of Dewey in this section follows Kvanvig MS) There may be additional readings of Kierkegaard's de Silentio that support a similar idea. For Dewey, 'moral faith' consists in submission to the authority of an ideal end—taking that end to have a rightful claim over one's desires and purposes—and religious faith consists in submission to the authority of an ideal that is so overarching that it unifies the entire self. What is key for Dewey is that faith is identified by the role it plays in an individual's life, not by the content of any propositions.

Does faith in this sense require anything by way of intellectual commitment? Dewey holds that the propositional commitments required by particular religions ought to be eliminated from such faith because they stifle inquiry—religion requires committing to (belief in) certain propositions regardless of what the evidence turns up, which is incompatible with open inquiry. Kvanvig adopts Dewey's conception of faith but holds that religion—even traditional Christianity—requires no specific intellectual commitments. Thus, while an individual who has faith might have intellectual commitments that are epistemically irresponsible, there is nothing essentially irresponsible about faith, because there are no intellectual commitments that are essential to it.

According to this view of faith, then, the primary locus of evaluation is the ideal itself. This could take a number of forms, depending on how we think ideals are adopted and what norms govern them. If ideals are, as Kvanvig suggests, primarily a matter of our deepest affections, then we can ask whether those affections are good or understandable or beautiful. Kvanvig thinks that a wide range of affections pass this test. If ideals are primarily a matter of moral commitments—one holds an ideal because one sees the goal as good or worthy—then we can ask whether these commitments are indeed good, although admittedly it might be hard to evaluate them apart from our own ideals. Finally, if there are any beliefs necessary to holding an ideal (the belief, for example, that that ideal is the best one), then these beliefs can potentially be evaluated epistemically.

## Epistemological (and Other) Issues for these Accounts

What is unique about these views of faith is that they deny that faith forms any part of the chain from evidence to cognitive attitude. Rather, faith is an attitude that may arise after the individual has evaluated the evidence she has and formed beliefs on its basis. Faith governs how the agent responds to the world in action. How, then, is faith to be evaluated, according to these views? I have already noted that an agent's practical response is generally sensitive to her beliefs: actions are only practically rational if the agent has certain beliefs that make them so. In other words, faith that *p* does not require belief that *p* (unless belief is itself a disposition to act), but the rationality of faith may rest on a belief. Thus, we can ask whether these beliefs really are rational in the case of the faith propositions. Finally, although this is beyond the scope of our discussion, a key question for these accounts that locate faith in the practical or moral realm is whether the attitudes they require are justified by our practical and moral norms.

# Conclusion

One way of looking at the question of the nature of faith is to examine how the typical or ideal Christian arrives at her attitude towards the faith propositions, and to locate faith in this process. Looked at in this way, the central question in determining the nature of Christian faith is whether the evidence conclusively tells in favour of the faith propositions. If it does, then the defender of rational Christian faith will want to locate faith somewhere in the normal epistemic process of evaluating and responding to truth-directed reasons. If it does not, then the defender of rational Christian faith will want to locate faith either as the element that takes the individual from the (inconclusive) evidence to belief in the faith propositions, or as some other attitude that the Christian takes towards these propositions.

A difficulty with starting with a view about what the evidence says, and then trying to locate faith in the process, is that this method typically assumes that there are (or are not) cases of rational faith, and then tries to explain how that could be. But this does not mean that this method cannot help with the problem of faith and reason. For one, views arrived at through this method will be better to the extent that they fit the data we have about faith—its uses in religious texts and in contemporary language, its function in religious and interpersonal settings, and so forth. For another, if the proponent of one of these views shows that there is *some* understanding of faith according to which Christian faith is rational, then she will have shown that there is *a* solution to the problem of faith and reason.

Another way of looking at the question of the nature of faith is to start with the data we have about faith and to try to come up with a hypothesis about what faith is that best captures this data. One then asks whether there are situations in which faith in that sense is rational or laudable, and whether Christian faith constitutes one of these situations.

A problem with this data-driven method is that there is potentially a lot of disagreement about what the data are. For example, if many actual Christians hold the view that faith is belief in the absence of evidence, but hold this view because their minister unreflectively transmitted it and they unreflectively adopted it, what should we make of their linguistic intuitions? Perhaps this poses no special problem beyond those already present in data interpretation. But one reason to worry in this case is that it is not clear whether there is one enduring concept of faith throughout time.

In any case, what is clear is that resolving the problem of faith and reason depends just as much on the correct analysis of faith as it does on figuring out where the evidence points in the matter of the faith propositions.

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### CHAPTER 4

# THE EXPERIENTIAL GROUNDING OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

THOMAS D. SENOR

## Introduction

In any reasonable epistemology, the great majority of what we know comes to us via the five senses. Indeed, in many circumstances, our having perceptual experience of a certain kind absolutely settles the matter. I know that Ted is at my house because I just welcomed him at my front door. I know that my dog has not run away because he barked when Ted stepped in. I know the air conditioner is working because I can feel the cold air coming from the vent.

While all but the most sceptically minded will grant that sense experience provides us with solid grounding for our beliefs about the physical world, the situation is rather different with religious experience. And although purported experience of God is the cause of much religious belief, it is not so obvious what its epistemic impact is. Can one come to know that God exists on the basis of religious experience? Can such experience be sufficient to justify religious beliefs?

In this chapter, I will be concerned with just these issues. In particular, I will go into significant depth in exploring the work of the contemporary philosopher who has given us the most detailed account of how purported experience of God is relevant to the epistemology of religious belief. That philosopher is William P. Alston, and the work is *Perceiving God* (1991). This chapter will be an exploration of Alston's important contribution to religious epistemology. While Alston's explicit focus is the role that experience plays in the religious beliefs of an individual, his work has important implications for the epistemology of theology as well.

In order to get a significant understanding of the position Alston develops, I will have to lay out several independent pieces before we can fit them together to see how the whole theory works. I will begin by getting clear on the first of the two primary claims that Alston wants to defend. This will necessitate a minor excursion into the nature of perception. I'll then move into a discussion of his second main project in *Perceiving God*. This will involve explaining the notion of a 'doxastic practice' and Alston's argument that the reliability of basic cognitive processes (e.g. sense perception) cannot be non-circularly demonstrated. This is a key component because it is tempting to suppose that although we have good reason to think that sense perception is reliable, we have little reason for thinking the same of religious experience. In fact, it is often thought that we even have positive reason for doubting the latter's reliability. Alston has much to say about the degree to which sense perception and the belief system that it generates (Alston dubs this 'SP') and 'Christian Mystical Practice' ('CMP') are parallel, and what the epistemic significance of this parallelism is. In the final section, I will discuss the issue of religious pluralism and the degree to which it has a negative impact on the justification of experientially grounded religious belief.

## Alston's First Project and Setting up his Second One

Alston undertakes two main projects in *Perceiving God*. First, he wants to explicate and defend the claim that religious experience is (or at least in principle can be) literal perception of God. Second, Alston argues that religious experience can contribute directly and substantially to justified belief in God's existence and that God is as God appears to one. Since the focus of this chapter will be on the second of Alston's concerns, I will begin with a brief account of his first project, which I will then put aside in favour of a detailed discussion of the second.

The title of Alston's book *Perceiving God* is no accident. With one rather sizeable caveat, Alston sets himself the task of showing that certain kinds of religious experience are literal *perceptions* of God. The big caveat has to do with the factivity of perception. Whereas, for example, one can *believe* that Santa Claus exists without Santa's actually existing, one cannot *perceive* that it is raining without it being true that it is raining. To say that perception is factive is to say that 'S perceives that X is F' entails that 'X is F'. Thinking again of Alston's first project, the factivity of perception implies that if Alston has effectively argued that there is genuine perception of God, then Alston has effectively argued that God exists. But it is no part of Alston's plan for *Perceiving God* to conclude anything that strong. So if he does not take himself to make a case for genuine perception, what does he take himself to show?

Most fundamentally, Alston's first project is to show that there is nothing in the concept of perception or in the theist's concept of God that would rule out the possibility that, in certain circumstances, humans literally perceive God. Furthermore, Alston argues that the structure of certain religious experience is very much in keeping with the general structure of sense perception. Beliefs associated with the relevant kinds of experience are manifestation beliefs ('M-beliefs'): beliefs to the effect that God is currently 'doing something vis-à-vis the subject—comforting, strengthening, guiding, communicating a message, sustaining the subject in being—or to the effect that God has some (allegedly) perceivable property' (Alston 1991: 1). The kind of experience that is the ground of M-beliefs is one in which it seems to the subject that God is directly present to her consciousness as *doing* something or as *being* some way.

Saying that God's doing something or having a certain property is directly present to consciousness is not to say that such consciousness is *sensory* consciousness. Sense perception in humans comes via the five senses, and each sense has its distinctive mode of consciousness. The types of religious experiences that interest Alston are like sense perception in that the experience presents the object of perception as directly present to consciousness, but unlike sense perception in that the mode of perception is non-sensory. That there are possible modes of perception over and above the standard human repertoire should not be controversial. After all, bats have a type of perception (echolocation) that is just such a mode. So the general concept of perception should not be equated with the particular variety of sensory perception as it is found in human beings .

Alston's first project, then, consists in specifying the kind of religious experience he intends to be discussing, offering multiple accounts of the metaphysics of perception according to which God could be literally perceived, if God exists and causes our religious experiences. That Alston is able to make as good a case as he does for literal perception of God is a notable achievement. But the first project is also importantly related to the second project: given his doxastic practice approach to epistemic justification, Alston wants to give an account of a basic doxastic practice from which justified perceptual belief in God can spring. Having made the case for the genuinely perceptual nature of some religious experience, Alston has begun to set up his argument that the epistemology of justified perceptual belief in God is not all that different from the epistemology of justified perceptual belief in standard physical objects. In the same way that my belief that the car is in the driveway is justified by my visual experience of the car in the driveway, my belief that God is strengthening me is justified by my experience of God's strengthening me.

Two more points about the use of 'justification' in Alston's second project need to be made before we get into the details. First, Alston accepts a version of epistemological externalism known as reliabilism. In order for a belief to be justified, it must be based on something (an experience or other beliefs, say) that is a reliable indication of the truth of the belief in question. So my belief that my car is in the driveway is justified by my visual experience only if that experience is a reliable indication that a car is in the driveway.

Second, justification can be had either directly or indirectly. A belief is directly justified if its justification does not come by way of other beliefs the subject has. So my belief that the car is in the driveway is directly justified if its justification comes from my visual experience of seeing the car there. If the belief had come about by my inferring it from the fact that you have asked me to move the car off the driveway, then it would be grounded not in an experience but in other beliefs I have.

We can now say just a little more about Alston's second goal: he argues that belief in God can be directly justified via religious experience in the much the same way (although not to the same degree) that standard physical object beliefs can be directly justified via sense perception, and that we are rational to think that such beliefs are reliably formed.

## The Christian Mystical Practice and Justification

A concept that plays an important role in Alston's epistemology generally, and in his argument for the justification of religious belief grounded in religious experience in particular, is that of a doxastic practice. The best way to explain what Alston has in mind here is by exploring briefly the sensory perception doxastic practice (SP) and then abstracting from that what is essential to the idea of a doxastic practice.

Suppose I am strolling around the park on a beautiful Friday afternoon in early summer. The birds are flying overhead, chirping; children are running in the grass, laughing and calling out to each other; and flowers are brightly coloured and smell sweet. As I take in my immediate environment, I come to have many perceptual beliefs. I see and hear the birds and children; I smell the flowers; I feel the softness of the grass on my bare feet; etc. But as I pay more attention, I notice two things that puzzle me: first, I seem to hear a lawnmower but I know that this park is mowed only on Tuesdays, and so I look around to see if I'm hearing something other than a mower; second, I notice that the grass in a patch on the far side of the park looks to be an unnatural colour, so I walk in that direction to see if the grass is really oddly coloured or if it is actually shaded, thus creating that illusion.

SP consists of a number of interacting belief-forming processes that not only produce beliefs but also include at least partial standards for their own epistemic evaluation. My background knowledge tells me that it is highly unlikely that the park is being mowed now, but I seem to hear the sound of a mower. Because of my background knowledge, my initial justification that I am hearing a mower is at least partially defeated. I also know that if I can get visual corroboration, then my defeating background knowledge will be overcome, and I will be fully justified in believing that the park is being mowed today. Similarly, I know that the grass on the other side of the park looks odd to me, but I also know that colours in shade look significantly different from colours in the sun. So my background belief gives me some reason to suspend judgement for the time being. But SP also tells me what I should do to resolve my current conundrum: move to that part of the park to get a better look at the grass.

A doxastic practice, then, is:

> a system or constellation of dispositions or habits, or to use a currently fashionable term, 'mechanisms', each of which yields a belief as output that is related in a certain way to an 'input'. SP, for example, is a constellation of habits of forming beliefs in certain ways on the basis of inputs that consist of sense experience.
>
> (Alston 1991: 53)

Alternatively put, doxastic practices are clusters of belief-forming processes together with rules for their regulation (i.e. defeating conditions and instructions for how to get more information when needed).

When a doxastic practice is widely practiced over time, it is 'socially established'. The question then arises about the conditions under which it is rational to engage in a doxastic practice. Some practices (like SP) are naturally engaged in and would take a great effort to withdraw from (if this is even possible at all). Requiring a practice to be shown to be reliable is too strong a condition (it turns out that not even SP can satisfy this—more on that presently), and so it is enough that a practice is socially established and that there is not good reason to think that it is unreliable. The type of rationality at issue here is practical rationality; that is, the kind of rationality that is relevant to actions (in this case, participating in a doxastic practice). So Alston argues that it is practically rational to take part in religious doxastic practices, and that beliefs produced by processes in at least some of these practices are prima facie justified.

For Alston, Christian Mystical Practice (CMP), in contrast to SP, is the cluster of belief-forming practices, beliefs, and habits that Christian religious experience gives rise to. (While other religious traditions will likely have their own doxastic practices, Alston focuses on Christianity because that is his own tradition and because it is helpful to have an example of a particular religious doxastic practice; also, even though the name suggests that the variety of religious experience in this practice is unusually 'high grade', Alston does not want the CMP to include only, or even primarily, full-blown mystical experience; the experience of the 'person in the pew' is his primary target.) CMP will include not only the beliefs and the processes that produce them, but also the conditions of epistemic defeat and corroboration. So, for example, one might have a religious experience that leads one to believe that God is currently doing X or that God has attribute A; but if God's doing X or being A are unlikely given background information (which could come from sacred texts, religious traditions, or creeds), then one will have a defeater for the justification one derives from one's religious experience.

Why has Alston changed the target from a defence of the epistemic justification of experientially based religious *beliefs* to a question of the justification of doxastic *practices*? In arguing that religious experience provides justification for belief in God, Alston makes key epistemic parallels between SP and CMP. As he sees it, there is a standard assumption that SP is known (and can be shown) to be reliable, whereas CMP (and other mystical practices) are generally considered unreliable. It is Alston's goal to show that the parallels between SP and CMP are much greater than is generally appreciated.

## Can We Show that SP Is Reliable?

Alston devotes a long chapter in *Perceiving God* and an entire short book two years later (1993) to the question of what reason we have to believe that SP is generally reliable. On the one hand, we have little doubt that it is reliable; this is demonstrated not just by what we officially acknowledge but also by the fact that we use SP almost constantly and put a great deal of trust in our practical reasoning in its deliverances. But what is this trust grounded in? Is it easy to show that SP is reliable?

Like CMP, SP is a *basic* doxastic practice. A practice is basic if it has belief-forming processes that are not dependent on other beliefs; there is a kind of autonomy that basic doxastic practices have that other practices that depend solely on processes that are belief-dependent lack. A basic practice is not dependent on other practices for the formation of its beliefs. The question to which Alston wants to direct our attention is: 'how could we ever show that SP is reliable?'

One possibility for demonstrating reliability finds its motivation in what we do in everyday contexts when we want to make sure that a given SP belief is true: we check the belief with further observation using both the same sense and with other senses when available. So to take an earlier example, if I hear what I take to be a lawnmower in the park but I believe that the park is never mowed on this day of the week, I will look for the source of the sound; if I see an operating mower that is the source of the noise, I will have verified that my hearing was reliable in this context. Or if I see what appears to be discoloured grass, I may change my perceptual position (and try to look at the grass in different lighting conditions) to see if the grass still looks unusual. If such a change of perspective continues to suggest that the grass is discoloured, and if there is a particular reason to be concerned about this, I can ask another person if the grass looks that way to him.

The main point here is simple: we can check on the reliability of SP by using SP—either by using the same type of perception (in this case it is as though we run the test again), by using a different mode of perception to check on the first, or by checking with a different perceiver.

There is, however, a serious problem with this way of arguing for the reliability of SP: it is fine as a method of checking to see whether processes that are generally reliable are getting at the truth in a particular instance. We know that even reliable processes get things wrong from time to time. But reliable processes will rarely get things wrong twice in a row; nor will two separate reliable processes typically get things wrong in succession. But the question we are asking about SP is not whether it can be used to check on the reliability of particular reports, but rather whether it can legitimately be used to provide evidence of its own reliability. And that is dubious.

In short, Alston charges any attempt to demonstrate the reliability of SP by using the processes of SP with 'epistemic circularity'. An argument is epistemically circular when the process that it is concerned to demonstrate the reliability of must be used in order to generate evidence of its own reliability. So if we argue that SP is reliable in ways that depend on the use of any of the five perceptual senses, we will have offered an argument that is circular in Alston's sense. And circular arguments are defective arguments. Distilled to the bare possibilities, it would seem that there are in principle two ways to argue for the reliability of SP: either (i) via an argument that depends on the reliability of SP and hence is infected with epistemic circularity, or (ii) a transcendental argument that shows that it is not possible for SP to be unreliable. Yet the history of epistemology does not provide any reason for optimism on the latter score.

The bottom line, according to Alston, is that the prospects for a non-circular, successful argument for the reliability of SP are grim. And so if one wants to denigrate CMP because it cannot provide a non-circular argument for its reliability, then one will have to look askance at SP for the same reason.

## A Second Argument for the Superiority of SP to CMP, and Alston's Reply

So neither SP nor CMP can be shown to be reliable via a non-circular argument. Yet it does not follow from the fact that there is not a good argument for the reliability of these practices that they are unreliable. They could be extremely reliable without our having a good way to demonstrate it. Perhaps, however, there is still an important difference between SP and CMP. Even recognizing that the argument we discussed is importantly circular, SP nevertheless has 'significant self-support'. To see what this amounts to, consider again why one might have thought that SP can be easily shown to be reliable: we think we can construct and run obvious tests for the reliability of SP. Do I suspect that my eyes are playing tricks on me? I can test them by looking at things close up, by touching the objects I am seeing, by asking others if they see what I see, etc. Were I to do this in normal cases of perception, I would find that the results of these tests would corroborate my experience, and that my vision is apparently reliable. The fact that, if I assume the fundamental reliability of SP, I can use SP to collect apparent evidence of its reliability is what Alston has in mind by 'significant self-support'. There is no reason in principle for a practice to be this way. Alston claims that, for example, the possible practice of accepting the deliverances of a crystal ball would not be one that would generate self-support (Alston 1991: 174). Although there may be no external, non-circular way of testing for the reliability of SP, the sense faculties do support each other in a way that you would expect if the process were reliable. And it is clear that SP is permeated with such support and that not all possible doxastic practices are. We, then, must now answer two questions: 'does CMP display significant self-support?' and 'are there reasons to think that CMP is unreliable?'

Matters get a bit complicated here, as what counts as a lack of significant self-support is relative to the practice involved. For example, consider two ways that SP exhibits such support: the reinforcement of several sense modalities and intersubjective reinforcement. My seeing the apparently long-dead, frighteningly large (apparent) spider behind the desk and consequently believing that I have uncovered an enormous, dust-covered dead spider gets support both by my asking my wife to look at it and to see if she sees what I see and by my eventually getting the nerve to touch it. So my initial belief is supported both by the experience of other sense modalities and by the testimony of others. Again, these methods of checking do not provide non-circular evidence of the general reliability of SP, but they do provide a certain amount of self-support in that if sense perception were generally reliable, then we would expect that if we were to use it to check on itself, we would get this kind of *cross-modal* (that is, supportable by more than one perceptual sense) and *intersubjective* (that is, supportable by asking other perceivers) corroboration.

If this is what significant self-support consists in, things do not look good for CMP. Suppose that Mary has an experience that she takes to be an experience of God appearing to her as loving, and so she believes that God appeared to her as loving. The two kinds of self-supporting tests that can be conducted to corroborate SP claims are apparently unavailable to her. For what other perceptual modality does Mary have available to her to check the apparent veracity of this belief? Even in Alston's view, although experiences of God can be literal perceptions, it would seem that, unlike sense perception, there is a single relevant perceptual mode. So while Mary might focus her attention in an effort to make as sure as she can that her perception is accurate, there is no alternative subjective perceptual means of corroborating her experience. Similarly, the way CMP seems to work provides no reason for thinking that a person physically located next to Mary will be likely to have a similar experience. Although there are reports of intersubjective or corporate religious experience, these seem not to be the norm. And even when there are many people having religious experiences in the same place at the same time, it is by no means clear that the experience is intersubjective in the same way sense experience is. That is, it might be that the best way to understand typical, corporate religious experience is as many instances of private (subjective) experience happening at once. These experiences may bear little similarity one to another, and in this way will be quite unlike the intersubjectivity found in SP.

Do the lack of multiple channels of support in an individual and the lack of intersubjective avenues of corroboration for religious experience mean that CMP does not enjoy significant self-support? If so, then we have discovered one way in which SP is considerably stronger than CMP.

Alston makes two points in response to this challenge. First, even though CMP does not have the same type of self-support that SP has, it does have other varieties of self-support. Second, there is a good explanation of why SP-type self-support is not available to CMP. I will take these points in order. The self-support of a doxastic practice depends on the nature of the reality with which that practice allegedly puts us in touch and the purpose of the practice.

> The basic function of SP in our lives is to provide a 'map' of the physical and social environment and thereby enable us to find our way around in it, to anticipate the course of events and to adjust our behavior to what we encounter so as to satisfy our needs and achieve our ends. Part of the self-support we have noted for SP constitutes the successful carrying out of this aim. To discover an analogous self-support of CMP we have to ask what its basic function in human life is. It is not primarily a theoretical or speculative function, any more than with SP, but it is not the same kind of practical function either. It is an analogous function, namely, providing a 'map' of the 'divine environment', providing guidance for our interaction with God.
>
> (Alston 1991: 250)

Whereas the function of SP is to provide us with enough detailed information about our physical environment to allow for successful living in it, the purpose of CMP is to provide us with what is needed for a good relationship with the divine and for our spiritual development. While CMP does not have the same cross-modal subjective and intersubjective means of generating significant self-support that SP has, its methods are in keeping with its function and end. Alston's idea for the kind of self-support that the participant in CMP could expect to find concerns the way in which the person's spiritual life would apparently change if she put into practice the methods that CMP recommends for one who wants to experience God and have her life spiritually transformed by the process known in CMP as 'sanctification'. Notice that this self-support is not as immediate as that of SP; you cannot expect spiritual transformation with the same immediacy with which you can check your vision (e.g. tactile double-checking; asking for the opinion of another person). Even though the immediate intersubjective testing that is a cornerstone of the self-support of SP is not available in CMP, there is a kind of intersubjective test that is. The fact that others who have undertaken the process of sanctification and followed the guidelines of CMP can report their experience— not simply their short-term apparent experiences of God, but the way that their lives have been changed as a result of their spiritual quest—makes it possible for CMP to gain long-range, intersubjective self-support.

Alston's second point is closely related to the first. The fact that CMP lacks subjective and SP-style intersubjective tests would be a telling mark against it if the reality that CMP allegedly puts us in touch with were of the same type as that to which SP gives us access. But if CMP is even close to correct in what it claims about divine reality, God is not an inert object that can be experienced at the whim of the perceiver; rather, God chooses when and where to reveal himself. So my not being able to test an experience by recreating the circumstances of my previous experience does not show that CMP is not reliable, since a perfectly fine explanation of my failure is simply that God ultimately decides when and where God is experienced. The fact that the person sitting next to me in the pew does not experience what I do can be similarly explained if CMP is true. In short, given the nature of the 'object' of religious perception, one would not expect it to be amenable to subjective and intersubjective self-supporting tests in the way that SP is.

Alston has argued that CMP is a socially established doxastic practice that exhibits significant self-support. While there is no non-circular way of establishing its reliability, there is also no good reason for thinking it is unreliable. For any socially established doxastic practice, it is rational to suppose that it is reliable and that its beliefs are prima facie justified. Therefore, it is rational to suppose that CMP is reliable and that its beliefs are prima facie justified. Along the way, Alston has argued that accepting that SP is a source of justification while insisting that practices like CMP are not is little more than 'epistemological imperialism' (1991: 199, 249). While Alston thinks that there are many important parallels between SP and CMP, he does not think that the amount or degree of justification offered by each is the same, granting that SP provides a higher grade of justification than CMP does.

## A MAJOR PROBLEM: RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Alston's work in *Perceiving God* provides a striking account of how religious experience might be thought to count as genuinely perceptual and how it can be construed as epistemically significant. If there is a socially established doxastic practice that takes Christian experience as its primary means of input, then engaging in this practice is rational; and, if the experience is genuine and undefeated, the beliefs formed on the basis of this experience will be justified in a quite robust sense. Even if the beliefs are defeated, Alston has shown how religious experience can generate prima facie justification (that is, if God exists). Since one of the goals was to determine how, if at all, religious beliefs can have prima facie justification or warrant, we will have found one such way.

There is, however, a serious objection. As Alston sees it, the problem is not a potential defeater for specific beliefs formed by CMP, but is rather a potential defeater for *the rationality of engaging in CMP at all*. This is the problem of religious diversity and it can be put as follows:

> Alston's theory would be right if there were a single religious tradition. If all those (or even the great majority of those) who have putative experience of God reported it pretty much the same way; if it gave rise to a single religious tradition, and indeed a single doxastic practice, then even if only a small minority of the population participated in it, it would nevertheless be rational to engage in. However, such is not the case. Instead of there being a single doxastic practice, there are a plethora of them. Even if we only stick to the major religions and we assume that there is a single practice for each of them (dubious assumptions both) there are five practices—one each for Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam— that produce inconsistent beliefs about the nature of God and how humans are to relate to the divine. Now if a person has done a fair bit of research into these different religious practices, and is justified in believing that one of these is more likely to be reliable than the others, then she would be rational in engaging in that practice. But for anyone who has not successfully conducted such research (which is surely at least 99 per cent of those who engage in religious practices), it is not rational to engage in any of these practices (since at least four of them are unreliable).

This is a powerful objection, in large part because it suggests an important dissimilarity between CMP and SP—a dissimilarity that would seem to have nothing to do with either the function of the practice or the nature of the reality with which the practice is supposed to put us in touch. While some cultures without a well-developed science tend to imbue physical objects with powers well beyond those that can be directly observed, nevertheless even in these societies physical objects are believed to have mostly the same properties that they are believed to have in scientifically advanced cultures. Put a little differently, while some cultures would want to add to the standard SP package, there aren't cultures that simply reject SP altogether or which radically differ in what they claim about the standard perceptual properties of physical objects.

Seeing that this marks a significant difference between CMP and SP is not the same as seeing *why* this distinction is important. Why is it problematic that CMP is one of several basic doxastic practices that is grounded in religious experience? The answer is clear. Because if we have no reason to think that one practice is considerably more reliable than its competitors and we know that at most one practice is reliable, then to engage in one practice over the others is to take part in a practice that we have reason to believe is unreliable. Given what we have been saying about our epistemic objectives, if one engages in a practice that one has undefeated reason to think is unreliable, then one is doing something that one should not, epistemically speaking.

To see this problem more clearly, consider the following analogy. There has been a terrible accident that involved several cars at a very crowded intersection. There are half a dozen eyewitnesses each of whom claims to have got a very good look at what happened and can give an accurate report. They make their statements to the police and it turns out that there are almost no points of universal agreement and many, many areas of flat-out contradiction between the various witnesses. Suppose that, early on in their investigation, the police know very little about any of the witnesses; they all appeared to be equally credible. Now if the police are rational, they'll not believe any of them. Why not? Because they know that most of these witnesses are not reliable (at least in the present circumstances). Given the amount of inconsistency between their various reports, at most one of them can be basically correct (it is also possible that none is). Should the police come to learn that precisely one of the witnesses has a track record of veracity while all the others are known to be prone to exaggerate or simply lie, then they would have good reason to accept the one testimony while rejecting the others. But without evidence that allows them to rationally differentiate between the veracity of the various reports, they should withhold belief in any of them, since to do otherwise is to accept a testimony that they have strong reason to believe is unreliable.

> Here is a general argument based on the above:
>
> P1. If for any event or subject matter there are multiple conflicting reports or multiple practices that produce conflicting claims about that subject matter, and if there is no independent evidence suggesting that one of the reports or practices is more reliable than the others, then if one believes exactly one of the reports or engages in exactly one of the practices, it is unlikely that what one will believe will be true or that the practice one engages in will be reliable.
>
> P2. One should not accept a report that one knows to be unlikely to be true or engage in a practice that one knows to be unlikely to be reliable.
>
> C. Therefore, if there is an event or subject matter about which there are multiple conflicting reports or multiple practices that produce conflicting claims about that subject matter, and if there is no independent evidence suggesting that one of the reports or practices is more reliable than the others, then one ought not to accept any single report or engage in any single practice.

The idea here is simple enough. If there are two greatly conflicting reports about an event or two greatly conflicting processes regarding particular subject matter, and one chooses to accept or engage in one instead of the other, one has less than a 50 per cent chance of being right (this is because there is always a third possibility; namely, that neither report or process is reliable). The more such reports/practices there are, the worse the probabilities get. Therefore, as long as there is more than one such practice, the probabilities will be less than half that the practice is reliable, and so one is not practically rational in engaging in it.

The application of this argument to CMP is obvious. The fact that the claims of the major religions vary so much, and that there is significant conflict among them, gives us strong reason to believe that no more than one of them is generally reliable. That means that if we lack independent evidence for the reliability of any particular religious tradition and yet accept one anyway, we are accepting something that we have good reason to believe is unreliable. Yet, clearly, if we accept something that our best evidence suggests is unreliable, then even if it should be reliable and hence produce prima facie justification, such justification will be overridden. Therefore, anyone who participates in CMP (without having independent evidence of its reliability relative to its competitors) is unjustified in doing so.

## Alston's Reply

The first prong of Alston's response is to point out that, in a case like that of the conflicting reports of the traffic accident, the conflict is of a decidedly different sort than is the conflict among religious traditions (or any other basic doxastic practices, for that matter). The police-report case is an instance of intra-doxastic practice conflict—all the sides to the dispute are participating in and giving their reports on the basis of SP. In such cases, there is always the possibility that further searching will bring to light significant evidence within the practice that will support one of the reports against the others. However, when the conflict is between practices, there is no possibility of this. What would be needed instead would be practice-independent evidence that would show that one or the other of the conflicting practices was in fact reliable. But it is hard to see what kind of evidence this would be when the practices are themselves basic (i.e. when they are practices that don't depend on other practices). So whereas waiting for further evidence is always an option when the conflict is within a practice, there is no reason to be optimistic about the eventual resolution of inter-practice conflicts.

The second prong is to consider other cases in which there are different, conflicting practices. Alston begins by contrasting psychoanalysts and behaviourists concerning the diagnosis and treatment of neurosis in human motivation. Both camps reject the fundamental data of the alternative position and offer drastically different explanations of neurotic behaviour. There seems to be no theory-neutral way to arbitrate between these two theories; no way to show either of them to be reliable or not. Does that mean that no psychologist should adopt either stance (or any other form of treatment that can't be independently shown to be reliable)? Hardly. Similarly, Alston also asks us to suppose that instead of there being one doxastic practice that takes as inputs sensory perceptual states and produces beliefs about the physical environment, there were multiple such practices. Furthermore, we will need to imagine that there is no way to show that, say, SP1 is either more or less reliable than is SP2 or SP3, etc., and that all these practices are socially established, coherent, and have a similar degree of self-support. In such a case, would our taking part in whichever SP practice we found ourselves naturally engaging in be practically irrational? Surely not, Alston thinks. What would the alternative be? Take part in no SP practice at all? That would be impossible.

The same conclusion, Alston avers, should be drawn about participating in CMP or in any one of the other socially established practices grounded in what Alston has dubbed 'mystical experience'. He grants that the fact that there are other competing mystical practices does lower the rationality in engaging in any one of them and should reduce one's confidence in the beliefs the practice produces (Alston 1991: 275). Even so, it is nevertheless rational to engage in whichever of them one finds oneself in.

## Religious Pluralism Again

*Perceiving God* is a remarkable book and is the best articulation and defence of the epistemological significance of religious experience that an analytic philosopher has ever produced. Nevertheless, I believe that the problem of religious pluralism causes bigger problems for Alston than he seems to recognize.

Recall the problem that, as Alston sees it, the diversity of religions poses for his theory. He has argued that there is no a priori reason for thinking that religious experience does not constitute genuine perception of God, and that it is prima facie rational to engage in CMP and that beliefs formed by CMP are prima facie justified. Though CMP cannot be shown to be reliable, it nevertheless contains a significant degree of internal or 'self' support. Add to this that it is a socially established, consistent doxastic practice and you get the result that CMP is practically rational to engage in. Alston then considers the objection that since CMP is not the only socially established, consistent mystical practice that exhibits significant self-support, one is not rational in engaging in it rather than in any of the others. He argues convincingly that since it is practical rationality that is at issue here rather than something more strongly related to truth acquisition (like, for example, epistemic justification) and since one's engagement in the process might well not be entirely voluntary (think about Alston's example in which there were multiple practices for sensory perception), one can hardly be charged with being irrational in engaging in consistent, socially established practice that exhibits significant self-support.

This all seems right to me. But I think that in seeing the issue presented by religious diversity as being the problem of how one can be *practically* rational in engaging in a practice when there are other, equally good practices that give conflicting results, Alston has not appreciated the full weight of the difficulty that religious pluralism causes for his view. For even if we allow that those engaged in CMP are practically rational in so doing, there are other ways in which the fact of religious diversity might undermine the epistemic credibility of the beliefs formed in CMP.

Here is one such way. Consider a practitioner of CMP who has read Alston's book. As a result of her reading, she has a deep understanding of how her religious experience might provide her with a solid epistemic footing for her Christian beliefs. However, she also comes to realize, as perhaps she has never really done before, the epistemic impact that the diversity of religions might potentially have on the epistemic rationality—the justification—of her faith. For even granting that she is practically rational in continuing to engage in CMP, with just a little rational reflection, she can come up with the following chain of thought:

> There are other religions, practiced by multitudes of people now and for the significant past. In terms of independent non-circular evidence, each religion (including my own) is on roughly the same footing. These religions make inconsistent claims but all are in part reports of experiences that purport to be of that which is the Ultimate Realty (to borrow a phrase from John Hick). Because of the conflicting nature of these religions, only one (at most) can be basically true. Therefore, since there are at least five mutually inconsistent MPs (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism), there is at best a 20 per cent chance that CMP is reliable, and at least an 80 per cent chance that it is unreliable. So I have good reason to think that CMP is unreliable. But that means that I have a strong reason to doubt any given MP belief.

Put in the vocabulary of contemporary epistemology, this line of reasoning provides the practitioner with an undercutting defeater for any of her CMP beliefs (or at least any that is not also supported by independent evidence). An undercutting defeater is good reason for thinking that a given belief is not reliably formed. For instance, the reason that a reflective person will not put much stock in what she sees when the lighting is bad is because she knows that vision is not reliable in those conditions. Similarly, if one knows that there are at least five competing MPs, and one has no independent way of telling that any one of them is more reliable than the others, then any belief one forms by taking part in an MP will be defeated. The objection, then, is that even if CMP is generally reliable, and hence the beliefs it generates are prima facie justified, their positive epistemic position is undermined by the plurality of MPs.

## Concluding Reflections

Like every other detailed philosophical position, Alston's epistemology of religious belief is not without its difficulties. Nevertheless, he is surely right in his initial insight: the fact that people have religious experiences that they take to be direct encounters with God is epistemologically important. Explicating just *how* it is important is a complex matter.

But if theology is genuinely the study of the divine, and human thought about God is at least partially grounded in religious experience, then the epistemology of theology had better have a place for—and eventually even an account of—the role of such experience in our knowledge of God. Alston's perceptual model of religious experience offers a promising start to this important project.

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## CHAPTER 5

# SAINTS AND SAINTLINESS

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## Understanding Sainthood

There are a number of potential difficulties that beset the philosophical study of sainthood. To begin with, the concept of sainthood is integrally connected with questions about morality and how we should live; indeed arguably the concept of sainthood (like many religious concepts) can only be adequately understood within a framework that gives primacy to this moral dimension. This may present an obstacle to the proper philosophical discussion of sainthood, given the compartmentalized nature of much contemporary academic philosophy, where the 'ethicist' and the 'epistemologist' often pursue very disparate agendas. Yet if we leave the confines of academic specialisms and start to look at how human life is actually lived, it becomes clear that our cognitive grasp of reality, what we know and understand of the world, often depends in crucial respects not just on what the world is like, but also on what *we* are like: how our sensibilities are cultivated and attuned, what we pay attention to, what distractions and temptations we have learned to set aside, how earnestly we persevere in the quest for sincerity and integrity, and how our perceptual powers are refined through experience—including the painful experience of sacrifice and suffering. The saint seems to be a paradigm case of someone for whom the process of interior moral transformation has reshaped their perception of the world and their grasp of reality. So although the focus of the present volume is an epistemological one, it will be important for the purposes of this chapter not to construe 'epistemological' in too circumscribed a way; for the life of the saint may turn out to be a life in which the epistemic and the ethical aspects are inseparably fused.

William James suggests as a starting point for enquiry the idea that the great saints can be recognized by certain shining qualities whose value is manifest to all.

> The greatest saints … show themselves, and there is no question; everyone perceives their strength and stature. Their sense of mystery in things, their passion, their goodness, irradiate about them and enlarge their outlines while they soften them. They

> are like pictures with an atmosphere and background; and, placed alongside of them, the strong men of this world and no other seem as dry as sticks, as hard and crude as blocks of stone or brickbats.
>
> (James 1960: 364)

Yet a second potential difficulty presents itself, namely that it is far from obvious that there is as much of a consensus on the relevant praiseworthy qualities as James supposes. For in judging the value of sainthood, the theist may wish to employ standards that may appear debatable or questionable to those who reject the theistic framework. Moreover, standards of value, methods of enquiry, and the extent of religious allegiance in a given society are all factors that are liable to change over time; and in this connection it is remarkable how much the cultural landscape has altered since James presented his *Varieties of Religious Experience* at the start of the last century. In one way James saw his own empirical methods as very 'modern' and radical: he proposed, in his chapter on saintliness, to 'measure the worth of a religion's fruits in merely human terms of value' (James 1960: 322)—something he clearly felt might ruffle the prevailing religious sensibilities of the time. But in spite of that, his attitude to sainthood, as is clear from the quotation at the start of this paragraph, was often very positive; and his general tone is one of open-minded interest and broad respect for many aspects of the religious outlook. By contrast, the 'naturalist revolution' (Leiter 2004: 2–3), which has increasingly swept through philosophy at the start of our own century, accords scant respect to theistic ideas and frameworks. For the most part, the moral concepts relevant to sainthood that figure so prominently in the theist's world view—sacrifice, grace, redemption, purification, blessedness, and so on—tend to be ignored as irrelevant to an acceptable moral philosophy.

There are a number of possible responses to this problem. Philosophers and theologians who are believers could perhaps resolve to discuss the topic of sainthood only amongst themselves, answerable only to 'the criteria of the Christian community' (to adapt a phrase of Alvin Plantinga from a slightly different context; Plantinga 1983: 77), or to some other explicitly religious standard. But insofar as the typical theist is committed to the religious world view not just as an academic exercise but also as something that is believed to irradiate and give value to all aspects of human life, he or she will surely want to reach out and attempt to communicate beyond the circle of co-religionists. So if sainthood is to be more than an esoteric notion that is ignored in the secular academy, the religious philosopher will want to discuss it in a way that at least may allow the sceptic or the non-believer to glimpse why it might be an epistemically and morally interesting notion, irrespective of whether or not it is finally accepted. This kind of 'bridge-building' approach is the one that will be adopted in what follows.

A further, and rather different, problem that arises for anyone who wishes to take saints and the saintly life as a topic for philosophical inquiry is that the very enterprise may seem presumptuous. For what academic writer, indulging in the luxury of airing his or her views from the comparative comfort of the study or the campus office, has a right to talk about the interior life of those who devote their lives to God? A possible response here is that in any inquiry into a distinctive form of human life there will always be a risk of a gap between the life of the inquirer and the life of the individual or group being studied, but this is not to say that no attempts can be made to narrow the gap, albeit in a small way. If we grant, as Wittgenstein suggested, that it is necessary to attempt in some way to enter a form of life if we are to aspire to understand it (Wittgenstein 1958: Pt I, S. 23), then this implies something important about the appropriate methods of inquiry for studying notions like sainthood. The habits of thought developed by philosophers of religion often predispose them to look at things in a fairly abstract and theoretical way, focusing on the analysis and evaluation of propositions, the truth or falsity of beliefs espoused by religious adherents, and the degree to which those beliefs are supported by argument and evidence. All this is perfectly valid and valuable, but a proper philosophical understanding of religious phenomena requires us to take account of much more. To be religious is not just to subscribe to certain doctrines; it is to follow a certain way of life and to take up certain commitments. Perhaps most importantly, it has always been understood as a *learning* process, or a process of training or *askesis*, as the Greeks called it. It is a discipline that involves not just the theoretical acquisition of knowledge, but a structured programme supported by rules and practices.

This observation has direct relevance for the understanding of saints and saintliness, since it points us towards the disciplines of spirituality (including prayer, fasting, meditation, and the like), which are in many traditions absolutely central to the saintly life. The term 'discipline' comes from the Latin verb *discere*, 'to learn'; but the learning envisaged here is not merely intellectual but also moral. The goal is to *change*, to set aside the spurious goals of self-enrichment, and to grow in wisdom and love of the good. And for this reason, the 'conversion' at which spiritual practices have traditionally been aimed, and to which the saint aspires, is not conceived as something that can be completed on a particular day, or even over a single season, but is thought of as a lifelong process. Thus the Rule of St Benedict, dating from the first century AD, speaks of a *conversatio morum*, often translated 'conversion of life', a continuous reshaping and renewal of one's whole character and way of life. Reflecting further on this conception of sanctity as the goal of a lifelong journey may do something to mitigate the apparent presumptuousness referred to a moment ago—the presumptuousness of the philosopher or theologian who ventures to scrutinize and evaluate the phenomenon of saintliness while pursuing the often very worldly career of a contemporary professional academic. For if sainthood is not so much a finally achieved state as the goal of a long and continuous process, it becomes easier to see it not as something wholly set apart from the normal, but as having some relation to the ordinary struggles and failings of the rest of us.

This brings us to a final issue in this introductory trawl of problems relating to the concept of sainthood, namely the relation between the saintly and the normal human life. As commonly used, it is clear that the term 'saint' is taken to refer to someone who is far advanced on the path of holiness. And this is why saints are revered both as exemplars, and also as people whose lives and witness contribute importantly to the spiritual development of more ordinary mortals. As Austin Farrer eloquently put it:

> Nature is tested by masterful violence, but if God is to be known, it is by humble obedience, and by patient waiting for Him…. No one has the spirituality to prove anything absolutely, and the spirituality of the ordinary believer is negligible equipment compared with that of the saint. What is received on authority must be proved in action, and yet it is never so proved that it could not be proved more…. The religious mind, incapable of proving faith in seventy years of imperfection, adds the years of others to its own and extends experiment by proxy.
>
> (Farrer 1957: 90, cited in MacSwain 2013: 156)

Saints, in short, are important to the ordinary believer both morally, because they inspire us, and also epistemically, because their lives provide authoritative evidence for the truth and value of the theistic outlook that we might find hard to access directly (compare Zagzebski 2012). Farrer's suggestion is not just that the saints are examples for us to imitate, but also that their training and devotion may have put them in a position to experience personally aspects of reality that ordinary mortals may only glimpse dimly and sporadically. Saintly lives can be thought of, in Farrer's terms, as an 'extension' of an experiment that for most of us has to remain incomplete; their moral and spiritual growth has allowed them to discern dimensions of reality that others may simply take on faith.

Nevertheless, despite the undoubted special status of sainthood in these respects, it is worth noting that there is also an enduring strand in the Judaeo-Christian tradition which insists that the call to embark on the long road of moral transformation is one that is addressed to all—often, perhaps especially, to sinners and those who lead ordinary flawed human lives (see Jer. 31:9; Hos. 14:2–5; Lk. 5:32; Mk. 2:17; Mt. 9:13). This connects with the point just made about the saints being in an epistemically superior position, able to discern aspects of reality that others glimpse very imperfectly. The saint may admittedly have something of the authority and status of an expert, as Austin Farrer implies in the above quotation, but it is not clear that the resulting knowledge is 'transmittable' in quite the way expert scientific knowledge is (where, for example, the layperson may say he knows about the structure of the atom because he takes on trust the knowledge of the professionals). For if the religious call is addressed to all, it will not be enough for us simply to receive the wisdom of the experts; each of us is required to strive as best we may to advance at least some way along the road they trod, so as to set about purifying and enriching our knowledge of the good and starting to bring our lives into conformity with it. So although the historical study of saints and sainthood will, quite legitimately, focus on those outstanding exemplars who are conventionally depicted with haloes and who have 'St' in front of their names, part of what gives the philosophical and theological study of saintliness its appeal is precisely that it is *not* a category that is impossibly far removed from 'ordinary' human life, but one that can, if the theistic outlook is correct, be integrated into a coherent framework designed to apply to all.

# THE VALUE AND SCOPE OF THE SAINTLY LIFE

That the goals of the saintly life may be ones that are in principle applicable to all, or at least to be aspired to by all, may strike some as objectionably counter-intuitive. In her much-anthologized article 'Moral Saints', Susan Wolf makes the following observation:

> Given the empirical circumstances of our world, it seems to be an ethical fact that we have unlimited potential to be morally good, and endless opportunity to promote moral interests. But this is not incompatible with the not-so-ethical fact that we have sound, compelling, and not particularly selfish reasons to choose *not* to devote ourselves univocally to realizing this potential or to taking up this opportunity.
>
> (Wolf 1982: 435, emphasis added)

Wolf's conclusion is that common-sense morality suggests that sainthood is an 'unattractive or otherwise unacceptable' ideal (Wolf 1982: 427). Her argument is partly based on the thought that devoting oneself *entirely and completely* to agapeic goals such as feeding the hungry or healing the sick would necessarily involve the sacrifice of countless other valuable but more personal activities, like 'reading Victorian novels' or 'playing the oboe'. Put that starkly, it may seem that the defender of the saintly ethic could simply retort that true compassion requires us to bite the bullet and sacrifice these agreeable activities. But Wolf's underlying point is a more interesting one: although no one item in the long list of rewarding activities of this kind could be singled out as a necessary ingredient in a well-lived life, nevertheless 'a life in which *none* of these possible ingredients of character are developed may seem to be a life strangely barren' (Wolf 1982: 441). In short, the perfectionist ethic implied by the saintly ideal, for example in Christ's injunctions to 'be perfect', or to 'sell all you have and give to the poor' (Mt. 5:48 and 19:21; Lk. 18:22; Mk. 10:21), is charged with being harshly incompatible with any reasonable idea of what makes a human life fruitful and fulfilling.

It is instructive in this connection to contrast the saintly Christian ideal with the more 'down-to-earth' Aristotelian approach to the well-lived life. Generosity, like all moral virtues, is for Aristotle a mean between two flanking vices of excess and deficiency. So in the Aristotelian perspective, to take concern for others to the point of selling all you have and giving to the poor is *not* to earn extra points on the virtue scale: it is to go 'over the top' and slide down towards the vice of excess. Excessive self-giving, in Aristotle's scheme of things, would miss the mark of virtue by sacrificing too much, just as, on the other side, refusal to give anything would miss the mark by displaying too little regard for others. To be sure, selfish tight-fistedness may for the Aristotelian be ethically worse than excessive giving; for an Aristotelian virtue is not always exactly equidistant from its flanking vices of excess and deficiency. But the fact remains that the Christian saint who gives up *all* for others is, to the Aristotelian way of thinking, lacking in that balanced sense of moderate self-esteem that is necessary for a fulfilled human life (Aristotle 325 BC, Bk 2, Chs 6 and 7; Cottingham 1991).

We thus have a long and powerful strand in Western ethical thought, still vigorously at work today, that seems to run directly counter to the Christian ethic of saintly self-sacrifice. This strand allows a privileged or protected area for legitimate self-concern and personal flourishing, and sets limits on how much an individual can or should be expected to give up for others. How far, then, should our own understanding of saintliness be responsive to this tradition?

One possible response, an uncompromisingly critical one, would be to dismiss the whole concept of saintly self-sacrifice as, in the words of the philosopher John Mackie, the 'ethics of fantasy' (Mackie 1977: 129–34). According to this view, partly reflected in the arguments of Wolf referred to above, the Christian injunction to give up all for others is both psychologically and ethically suspect: it not only verges on being impossibly difficult to adopt, given certain deeply ingrained human impulses towards self-referential concerns, but, from an ethical point of view, appears incompatible with an enormous range of ordinary, intuitively quite legitimate, human pursuits (Cottingham 1983: Section 2). This kind of objection can be linked to the 'argument from integrity', developed by Bernard Williams in connection with his well-known critique of utilitarianism. This latter ethic is often construed as requiring us to subordinate our own interests entirely to the goal of maximizing global utility; but, as Williams points out, it seems doubtful whether I could function as a human being at all unless my own individual pursuits and preferences were allowed some special weighting in my deliberations. It seems that I would disintegrate as an individual if I were obliged to drop any activity or project in which I was engaged whenever another project presented itself whose contribution to the general utility was marginally greater. Were such the case, it seems that I would have no real character—there would be no distinctive pattern to my life. I would simply be, in Williams's phrase, a cog in a 'satisfaction system' that 'happened to be near certain causal levers at a certain time' (Williams 1981: 4).

These debates over impartiality versus self-preference, which have loomed large in contemporary philosophical literature, prompt one to ask how far the Christian ideal of saintliness is really to be lumped together with the kind of global impartialism and impersonalism found in certain utilitarian and other secular ethical outlooks. It is certainly true that Christian ideals like that of the brotherhood of man (based on the idea of God as father of all) invite us to reach beyond the particularities of tribal and national allegiance, towards universal justice and respect for all humanity. Moreover, in interpreting the command to love one's neighbour as oneself, Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan invites us to regard as a 'neighbour' anyone in dire need or distress—an idea, as Nicholas Wolterstorff has recently shown, that has deep roots in the Hebrew Bible, for example in the injunctions found in the Prophets and the Psalms to care for the 'quartet of the vulnerable'—orphans, widows, the impoverished, and resident aliens (Zec. 7:9–19; Is. 1:17; Ps. 147:6; Wolterstorff 2008: 76). But in reflecting on these scriptural insights it is important to notice that the Judaeo-Christian ethic by no means outlaws all partialities or special relationships; on the contrary, the duty of loyalty to family is enshrined in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:12), and Christ is depicted in the Gospels as having close personal ties (for example, to his mother, to the 'beloved disciple' who was special to him, and to the family of Lazarus in Jn. 19:25–7 and 11:35). If we take these examples into account, it seems a distortion to see the Christian saint as required to forswear all partialistic concerns and commitments in favour of complete impersonal detachment. Arguably, the love for one's fellow creatures that forms the core of the Christian message is a love that is initially manifested not in some impersonal and detached concern for 'humanity in general', but rather in the committed relationships which we forge with those whom we encounter in our individual lives (this point is developed in Oderberg 2007).

This last point has important implications for the structure of the saintly life. Reflecting on the extreme psychological difficulty of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice has led some critics to suppose that the ethic of saintliness is one we may admire from a distance, but which for the mass of mankind is far beyond what can be reasonably adopted into a feasible blueprint for the good life (I once took this view in Cottingham 1991: 815–16). But as David Oderberg has persuasively argued, there are considerable costs involved in separating off saintliness as a special moral category in this way:

> How can morality consist of a set of [partialistic] norms for the mass of mankind yet be overlaid by an ideal that is completely *at odds* with what those norms require? It is to place the saint in a wholly different species of agent, as though she were not *one of us*—an exemplar for mankind.
>
> (Oderberg 2007: 60, emphasis in original)

In short, if the Christian outlook is to provide a coherent model for human life, it seems that we must find a way of *integrating* the saintly ideal exemplified by Christ's life into a pattern for living to which we can all, in principle, aspire. This means that there must be no *radical* discontinuity (as there is in much contemporary secular ethics) between the life that is required of us as ordinary human beings, and the kind of life that exemplifies saintliness.

To explore this further, we need to delve deeper into the psychodynamics of the saintly life. For although saints are especially admirable people, they are not plausibly understood as strange beings governed by higher than ordinary standards of action, or obeying more than ordinarily compassionate and outgoing rules of conduct. Instead, the saint is better understood as someone subject to ordinary human weaknesses and temptations, yet one whose epistemic situation is progressively transformed and purified so that they start to understand themselves and their relation to their fellow humans in a new light. This in effect brings us back to the point made in the first section about the integral connection between the moral and the epistemic dimensions of sainthood. Saints are not just those whose conduct rises above the norm; they are those whose epistemic powers (of discernment, of understanding, of perception) have undergone a transformation. And if the message of grace in the Gospels is true, this is transformation that all of us, however flawed, can in principle dare to aspire to.

## SAINTLINESS AND TRANSFORMATION

Although Christian ideals such as sanctity of life generally receive scant attention in the contemporary academic world, there is a wealth of philosophical discussion of conduct that goes beyond what is normally expected or required. In particular, the moral category of the 'supererogatory' has generated a very considerable philosophical literature (see Heyd 2012), and this category is often loosely linked with saintliness, following J. O. Urmson's seminal article 'Saints and Heroes', which was mainly about supererogation (Urmson 1958). The origins of this category can be traced back to the Middle Ages, for example in Aquinas's discussion of the distinction between 'precepts' (*praecepta*), which are commandments to be obeyed by all, and 'counsels' (*consilia*), which concern what is good and recommended, but not strictly required (Aquinas 1266–73: I–II q.108 a.4, and II–II q.184 a.3). The basic idea has its roots in St Paul, who, for example, recommended chastity, but allowed that it might not be suitable for all (1 Cor. 7:25); in the Gospels, moreover, we find Jesus telling the rich young man 'if you want to enter life, keep the commandments', but adding that if he wants to be perfect, he should sell all his possessions for the poor (Mt. 19:16–22). The nature and scope of the supererogatory became a subject of fierce dispute between Catholic and Protestant theologians following the Reformation (see Heyd 1982: Ch. 1).

For present purposes, however, we may simply note that the Christian ideal of saintliness in some respects seems to subvert the standard distinction between what is morally required and what is 'above and beyond the call of duty'. In conventional morality, I have a duty not to harm others, but (with certain qualifications) I am not normally required to help them, and I am certainly not required to love them. But if we consult the Fourth Gospel, we find the following striking command issued by Jesus to his disciples, during his long discourse on the eve of the Passion: 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: as I have loved you, that you also love one another' (Jn. 13:34). The Greek word translated as 'commandment' here is *entolē*, the term normally used in the Septuagint Greek version of the Hebrew Bible to translate *mitzvah*, plural *mitzvot*, the commandments given by God to the Israelites via Moses. So not only the solemn context (the night of his betrayal and arrest leading to his death), but also the specific terminology of command used by Christ, make this saying pregnant with authoritative force. The disciples are solemnly enjoined to love one another.

If commands flowing from God generate moral obligations, then the inference from this (given certain premises of the Christian faith about the status of Christ) will be that the disciples of Christ were placed under a moral obligation to love one another. Indeed, assuming that this saying of Christ was meant to apply not just to those actually present at the time, but also to disciples of Christ generally, it will follow that *all* Christians are under an obligation to love one another. And a further short step, if we combine this with other teachings of Christ such as the parable of the Good Samaritan, will take us to the conclusion that all followers of Christ are under an obligation to show love to any fellow human being in need. The upshot is that Christian ethics make obligatory or require what in many other ethical systems is thought of as at best supererogatory—loving one's fellow human being. Loving every fellow human, even one's enemies (Mt. 5:44), is normally taken to be the hallmark of a saint; but the above reasoning suggests that in the Christian conception we are all called to be saints in this sense.

An obvious objection to this conception is based on the maxim that 'ought' implies 'can'. The actions of a 'minimally decent Samaritan', to use Judith Jarvis Thomson's phrase (Thompson 1971), may be within the reach of all of us; giving a cup of water to a thirsty beggar is one thing, but *loving* them is surely not within our voluntary control, so cannot be a duty (except perhaps for a very rare kind of person who is constituted differently from the rest of us). To respond to this objection we need to take into account the idea broached towards the end of the previous section, about sainthood involving a progressive epistemic transformation. The teachings of Christ include an account of a final judgement separating the 'sheep' and the 'goats', where those who failed to reach out to the hungry or homeless or prisoners are told by the King: 'whatever you did not do for one of the least of these my brothers, you did not do for me.' (Mt. 25:45). A long tradition of subsequent Christian teaching enjoins us to 'see Christ in the stranger'. And what this seems to imply is *not* that in the search for perfection the saint should grit his teeth and try to find a repulsive ragged beggar somehow 'loveable' in a sentimental way, but rather that he or she should start to see something authentically Christlike in the very humanity and vulnerability of the human being now in front of him.

There are two ways of construing this transformed or purified state to which the saint must aspire. One is that the kind of moral improvement envisaged consists simply in faithful obedience to the commands of Christ to feed the hungry, visit the sick, and so on—in other words, that the saint is a person who changes volitionally so as to be willing to conform his actions to what is divinely required *just because* it is divinely required. But the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard suggests a more plausible interpretation, namely that 'the person who loves becomes more and more intimate with the commandment, becomes at one with the commandment' (Kierkegaard 1985: 375–6). Stephen Evans convincingly glosses this as the claim that 'a person … who is perfected in love ceases to experience that call to love as a duty' (Evans 2013: 86).

If we follow up the implications of this idea, it seems promising to construe the process of being 'perfected in love' as a kind of shift of *perception*. Instead of being viewed as belonging to a despised category that invites neglect or exclusion (the 'scrounger', the 'welfare recipient'), the person in need starts to be seen as a human being like myself, with whom I might easily have changed places, had things gone differently. The aspiring saint's eyes are progressively opened to this crucial dimension of human interchangeability; things start to be seen less as a matter of my being disturbed or importuned by you, and more a matter of potential mutuality and reciprocity. It is this dimension that seems to be underlined elsewhere in the teachings of Christ. Having commanded his disciples to love one another, Christ immediately adds a kind of gloss: '*as I have loved you,* that you also love one another'. And when, much later in the discourse in Chapter 15, he recapitulates the command, we once again find not just a bald instruction, but the same closely associated reciprocal clause: 'this is my commandment, that you love one another *just as I have* *loved you*' (Jn. 15:12). One could read this as merely an adverbial comparison—'love one another in the same way, or with the same degree of concern'; but it seems much more plausible to read it as a reason that *grounds* the command, or comes very close to doing so. It is significant that earlier on in the same discourse we have the episode of the washing of the feet (with which the Mandatum is still closely associated in the church's liturgy for Holy Thursday), and here again we have exactly the same reciprocal link: 'If I your master and teacher have washed your feet, so too you ought to wash one another's feet' (Jn. 13:14).

How does the aspiring saint come to see that we must love one another? According to the suggestion proposed here, it is by having his or her eyes open to the fact that whether we like it or not we are bound in relations of reciprocity—this is the very essence of what it is to be human. I am not an isolated autonomous independent figure who can dole out benefits either to myself or to others as I see fit, on the basis of my lordly assessments of the requirements of 'practical reason'; on the contrary, I need the love and concern of others every day of my life, from birth to death. And once I recognize my dependency, and the fulfilling and healing power of the loving action of another towards me, I cannot but recognize that I am bound to reach out in a similar way to others who need my care. This is surely the force of Christ's demonstrating his love for the disciples in the foot-washing, and of his subsequently *directly associating his own love for them* with his appeal to the disciples to love each other. Although it is phrased as a commandment, it is in fact a piece of *teaching*, a guiding towards the rational enlightenment that discloses the unavoidable reasons-based imperative of love, grounded in the objective facts of human dependency and mutuality (Cottingham 2014).

It is one thing to grasp this intellectually and another to absorb it so deeply that it infuses one's entire outlook and relationships with others. If the path to sainthood is a long and hard one, then the achievement of purity in life must be a matter of degree, and some have no doubt undergone more radical transformations in this respect than others. But the key point for present purposes is that progress along this path requires not just 'moral fibre'—virtues (valuable though they are) like determination, perseverance, steadfast adherence to duty—but a constantly deepening perception of the meaning of what it is to be a vulnerable human being, and a resulting lifting of the veils that cut us off from 'the least of these my brothers and sisters' (Mt. 25:40). The change, then, is not just a change in behaviour but in *knowledge*: what was before occluded about the status of my fellow humans and my relation to them comes plainly into view, as something that I now know and understand in its full significance.

## SAINTS VS. HEROES

'Saints' are coupled with 'heroes' in the title of the influential philosophical article already mentioned (Urmson 1958); and in some of the more dubious products of today's popular culture the two terms appear to have become virtually interchangeable. In a recent advertisement for one of the computer war-games that have become worryingly ubiquitous we find the following: 'Saints and Heroes, the Unit Pack for *Total War*: honed by years of relentless training and tempered in the fires of battle, these elite warrior units excel in their fields, and stand head-and-shoulders above their rank-and-file brothers'. Banal though these phrases are, they recall a type that has been widely admired and looked up to from ancient times—the strong man or champion who excels in 'greatness'. Yet if we revert to our opening epigraph by William James, it is clear that he would have rejected any such lumping together of 'saint' and 'hero', since he sharply distinguishes saints from the 'strong men of the world'. For all their power and seeming strength, James seems to suggest, heroes are curiously flat figures, lacking the psychological depth and true moral stature of the saint.

James's insights here are prefigured in one of the most interesting reflections on the hero in Western literature: Tolstoy's portrayal of Napoleon. Noting how many cultivated Russian aristocrats idolized Napoleon in his time, even when their country was on the point of being invaded by his forces, Tolstoy in his depiction of the retreat of the French army from Moscow allows us to see the underlying triviality and emptiness of the self-styled 'Emperor':

> Napoleon, taking himself off home wrapped in a warm fur cloak and abandoning to their fate not only his comrades but men who (in his belief) were there because he had brought them there, feels *que c'est grand* ['what *greatness* there is in all this!'], and his soul is at ease .... Greatness would appear to exclude all possibility of applying standards of right and wrong .... And it never enters anyone's head that to admit a greatness not commensurable with the standard of right and wrong is merely to admit one's own nothingness and immeasurable littleness. For us, who have the standard of good and evil given us by Christ ... there is no greatness where simplicity, goodness and truth are absent.
>
> (Tolstoy 1961: Bk 4, Pt 3, Ch. 18)

Tolstoy's depiction of the 'great' hero Napoleon is sharply contrasted with the way he presents the Russian Commander-in-Chief Kutuzov. Superficially not a very prepossessing figure; elderly, awkward, and somewhat infirm; widely ridiculed, and criticized behind his back, Kutuzov is yet portrayed as one who is deeply motivated by compassion, and by a constant desire to minimize suffering and loss of life. As the French enemy retreats in disarray, desperately hungry and cold, he tells the troops: 'You see what they are reduced to: worse than the poorest of beggars. While they were strong we did not spare them, but now we may even have pity on them. They are human beings too, isn't that so, lads?' (Tolstoy 1961: Bk 4, Pt 4, Ch. 6).

The famous (and nearly contemporaneous) philosophical reflections on heroism by Friedrich Nietzsche point in a very different direction, and provide a harsh critique of the Christian ideals of saintly compassion and concern for others that are extolled by Tolstoy. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche rails against compassion, and those moralists of the 'herd', who 'have an almost feminine inability to remain spectators, to *let* someone suffer'. The outlook of those who follow the Christian ideal is contrasted with the spirit of the 'new philosopher', which will 'grow to such height and force that it feels the compulsion [for] a revaluation of values, under whose new pressure and hammer a conscience would be steeled, a heart turned to bronze' (Nietzsche 1966: §§ 202, 203).

The two contrasting visions of the moral landscape presented here by Tolstoy and by Nietzsche diverge so radically that one might suppose that the choice between them is a matter of arbitrary or subjective preference, and that the decision to follow the path of sainthood, which on any account may often lead to great personal sacrifice, can be based only on faith, not on rational argument or evidence. But some of the epistemological results that have emerged in our discussion of sainthood suggest otherwise. If the saint is one who undergoes a progressive deepening or purification of his or her perceptions and sensibilities, then it seems reasonable to assume that, as that process continues, certain features of the landscape will become salient which might earlier have escaped attention. By contrast, in his scorn for the 'weakness' of the herd, Nietzsche's perception of his own status vis-à-vis that of others appears curiously blinkered. As Philippa Foot has observed, in looking down on 'inferiors', as Nietzsche did, Nietzsche lacks that deep sense that 'one is always, fundamentally, in the same boat as everyone else, and that therefore it is quite unsuitable for anyone to see himself as "grand" ' (Foot 1994: 9). Though Foot does not take up a Christian perspective, or invoke the dynamics of the saintly life, her insight here clearly links up with our previous suggestions about the way in which vulnerability and mutuality lie at the centre of the Christian moral ideal. Martha Nussbaum develops further this point, albeit in entirely humanist terms:

> What should we think about a human being who insists on caring deeply for nothing that he himself does not control; who refuses to love others in ways that open him to serious risks of pain and loss; who cultivates the hardness of self-command as a bulwark against all the reversals that life can bring? We could say, with Nietzsche, that this is a strong person. But there clearly is another way to see things. For there is a strength of a specifically human sort in the willingness to acknowledge … the limits and vulnerability of one's body, one's need for … friendship … the willingness to form attachments that can go wrong and cause deep pain, in the willingness to invest oneself in the world ….There is, in short, a strength in the willingness to be porous rather than totally hard, in the willingness to be a mortal animal living in the world.
>
> (Nussbaum 1994: 160)

Both Foot and Nussbaum, though neither explicitly acknowledges it, could hardly have arrived at their views without being influenced, consciously or subconsciously, by the Judaeo-Christian ethical tradition that mistrusts worldly greatness, and points us towards the shifts of perception that can disclose the value of compassion. The underlying idea is that the more altruistic and compassionate viewpoint flows from purified perception, from a more discerning awareness of the human condition; and this in turn entails that the superiority of the saint over the hero is in part an *epistemic* superiority: the saint is vividly aware of aspects of the universal human predicament to which the grand but essentially self-oriented 'hero' is blind. But putting it in these epistemic terms, thinking of the saint as one who has better or more vivid awareness of the vulnerability he or she shares with others, in turn prompts a further question. Can the rejection of the 'heroic' model for human life, in favour of the openness to others that is characteristic of sainthood, be understood in entirely humanistic terms, as both the philosophers just mentioned seem to suggest? Is the theistic dimension of sainthood simply a piece of historical baggage that can be discarded, so that we could preserve the moral insights associated with it within the framework of an entirely secular world view? Or is there something about the nature of sainthood that makes a theistic framework indispensible for understanding it? To this important question we may now turn in the concluding section of our discussion.

## Sainthood and the Theistic Framework

We began this chapter by noting the need for theological and philosophical discussion of sainthood to reach out, as far as possible, beyond the confines of the community of believers, in order to explore the psychological, ethical, and epistemic dimensions of the phenomenon that should be of interest to all who are concerned to reflect on the human condition. Yet it is also clear that any attempt at a reductionistic or purely humanist account of saintliness would be seriously deficient. One could of course speak by extension of a 'saintly' person, meaning simply a very good or morally admirable person; but the connotations of the term 'saint' through the long history of Western thought and literature, together with the etymology of the term, which links it to the religious ideas of sanctity or holiness, locate its meaning firmly within a religious framework.

The accounts we have of the lives of many of the most famous saints stress the extent to which those lives were informed by mystical experiences and ecstatic visions of the divine, often as the culmination of long periods of prayer and self-mortification (the sixteenth-century mystic St Teresa of Ávila is a paradigm case). It could perhaps be argued that such direct perceptual visions of the divine are just as important an element in sainthood, or even more important, than the more practically oriented moral and epistemic transformations we have mainly been focusing on in this chapter. Against this, however, it seems clear that such mystical experiences, though a common feature of the lives of many saints, cannot be either a necessary or a sufficient condition of sainthood. Ecstatic visions, however frequent and vivid, could not qualify someone as a saint if their lives were morally dubious; and conversely, someone whose life was a true imitation of the self-sacrificial love of Christ could not plausibly be denied the title of a saint on the grounds that they had failed to undergo the kinds of experience Teresa underwent.

Another way in which the concept of sainthood appears to require its being located within an explicitly theistic outlook concerns the virtues that characterize the saintly life. The highly influential framework articulated by Thomas Aquinas for understanding the ideal Christian life owes much to Aristotle's theory of the virtues. This theory offers an account of the good life as manifesting both moral virtues (instilled by training and habit), and intellectual virtues (of practical wisdom and judgement), that ensure our conduct is rational and appropriate to the circumstances we encounter in life (Aristotle 325 BC: Bk 2 and Bk 6). No doubt the Christian saint will need to have these 'natural' virtues, both moral and intellectual; but Aquinas goes on to describe the special nature of the additional 'theological' virtues—faith, hope, and love—which cannot be acquired by natural means alone, but need to be 'infused' by divine grace (Aquinas 1266–73: I–II q. 63–5; cf. Stump 2011). More generally, if we reflect on the theistic framework for understanding the human condition, at any rate within mainstream Christianity, it becomes clear that the search for moral perfection is never conceived as something that could be undertaken entirely on our own initiative or simply from our own resources. Theism is committed to the idea not just of an objective morality and objective standards to which a good human life must conform, but, much more than that, of a goal for human life that is laid down by the loving creator who is the source of all goodness, and who calls each of us towards that goal and provides the grace enabling us to strive towards it.

Allowing room for the role of divine grace thus seems to be an essential requirement for any plausible account of sainthood. There is a long history of theological disputation about the precise extent of the role of grace, from positions which make sainthood entirely a matter of divine bestowal of grace, to those which emphasize the contribution made by the human agent; and it is beyond the scope of the present chapter to explore these debates here. But if we look at some of the earliest accounts of sainthood, the story is often one of dramatic divine intervention to transform a sinful life, the paradigm case of this being the sudden conversion of St Paul when a blinding light appeared to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–19). Paul describes himself as having been the 'worst of sinners', on whom God poured 'more and more of his grace' (1 Tim. 1:14–16). On the face of it, the conversion account makes Paul entirely passive, literally struck down by divine action 'out of the blue'. But clearly the subsequent life of a convert should not be understood as a robotic or mechanical process—that would make it devoid of moral significance—but rather as a transformed human existence, bound up with an interior moral and spiritual regeneration. The conversion of St Augustine provides an interesting example here, since his own comments suggest that it did not happen without considerable resistance: he was extremely reluctant to abandon his former way of life (Augustine *c.*398: Bk 1 and Bk 8). And this gives some support to the account of the role of grace that is offered by St Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, only when a person ceases to cling to past wrongdoing, only when their resistant will becomes quiescent, will there be room for an infusion of divine grace.

So the salvific action of God, on this view, is not something operating entirely in spite of us, like the power of gravity; rather, some minimal degree of voluntary change on the part of the subject is necessary for grace to do its further work (for a compelling account of this process, see Stump 2010: 165–7, drawing on Aquinas 1266–73: I–II q. 9). A secular analogy which some may find helpful here can be drawn from the world of psychotherapy: often individuals will be 'blocked' from perceiving certain truths about their behaviour, so that they find it impossible to change damaging perceptions and patterns of conduct. The result is that they appear locked into a destructive way of life that they are unable to break out of. Only when they are prepared to acknowledge their vulnerability and accept help, opening themselves to the often painful process of analysis, will the damaging projections start to be lifted. The process cannot be accomplished unaided; but equally there is need for an initial act of cooperation on the part of the subject for the healing process to get underway. Once again, both in this psychotherapeutic analogy, and in the religious idea of the operation of divine grace, we can see the intimate fusion of epistemic and moral components in the progress towards growth and healing.

The idea that there is an unavoidably theistic element in any acceptable account of sainthood is reinforced by considering the interior character of the saintly life. As described in countless biographies about the saints, and in many of the writings they themselves have left, the saintly life is not merely one of doing good; it is a life conceived as a 'journey of the mind towards God' (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*) to quote the title of St Bonaventure's famous work: a life sustained and formed by the disciplines of spirituality, such as prayer, fasting, and meditation. Paul urges his followers to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. 5:17), and the life of Christ, for Christians the pattern of holiness, is described in the Gospels as one not just of self-sacrificial action, but of constant prayer (Mk. 1:25; Mt. 14:23; Lk. 6:12; Jn. 17:1–26). Prayer is often construed in our modern secular age as a primitive and superstitious attempt to gain benefits that would be better obtained by scientific methods (for example praying for a cure instead of consulting a doctor). But many scriptural and later sources suggest that its primary function is to bring the person praying closer to God. Christ is described in the Gospels, particularly the Fourth, as being at one with the Father; his status, for Christians, is of course unique, but it will be characteristic of all those we consider to be saints that they will aspire to ever closer identification with God and with the good, and in this sense the life of the Christian saint will be an 'imitation of Christ' (*imitatio Christi*), to quote from the title of a famous devotional text and handbook of spirituality from the fifteenth-century writer St Thomas à Kempis. Recapitulating a long theological tradition, Kempis aims to guide his readers along the path to 'consolation and peace', 'submission', 'purity of mind', 'the joy of a good conscience', 'putting up with discomfort', 'gratitude for the grace of God', and 'taking up the Cross' (the phrases quoted are some of the headings from Bk II of Kempis *c.*1420).

Though this captures much of what is widely understood as belonging to the saintly life, the account of Kempis has been criticized as laying too *much* stress on the interior dimensions of sainthood. The twentieth-century theologian Hans Urs von Balthazar had Kempis specifically in his sights when he objected that 'the love of God can only be fulfilled if it expands into the love of neighbour' (2001: 103). A possible resolution of this tension between the 'interior' and 'exterior' dimensions of the saintly life may perhaps be effected if we reflect further on the epistemic aspects of the 'conversion of life' referred to earlier (see the first and third sections above). The kind of conversion of life at which the saint aims is not just a matter of adopting certain spiritual practices and disciplines; nor is it simply a change in beliefs or in the theological doctrines that are espoused. Rather, it involves a fundamental epistemic shift; a shift in the way the world is perceived, and the way I view myself in relation to others. To borrow an observation of the theologian Sarah Coakley from a somewhat different context:

> What shifts … is not merely the range of vision afforded over time by the interplay of theological investigation and ascetical practice, but the *very capacity to see*. What is being progressively purged … is the fallen and flawed capacity for idolatry, the tragic misdirecting of desire. One is learning, over a lifetime—and not without painful difficulty—to think, act, desire, and *see* aright.
>
> (Coakley 2013: 19–20, italics in original)

For those who progress sufficiently far in this daunting task, there is, according to Christian doctrine, the hope of final blessedness. What this may mean in terms of the afterlife is no doubt a matter of revelation rather than rational determination; but there is a long tradition going back to the Gospels and to St Paul which speaks of the final vindication of those who suffer for righteousness' sake, and of the incorruptible crown awaiting the saints in heaven (Mt. 5:12; 1 Cor. 9:24–5). However that may be, it is worth noting, as we bring this survey of saints and saintliness to a close, that construing the rewards of sainthood in *purely* eschatological terms would be to leave out something vitally important from the theistic picture of sainthood. The 'blessedness' of which the Gospels speak is surely not an external incentive offered to bolster an otherwise counter-intuitive picture of the way life should be lived. On the contrary, if, as the theist maintains, we are created by a source that is itself pure love, if we are made in that image, then our deepest fulfilment will lie in realizing that love in our lives. However imperfectly we may be able to pursue it, love must be the key to meaningfulness in the lives of each of us. Self-interested goods may be, as far as they go, authentic goods; but in the absence of love, as St Paul's famous analysis in the first letter to the Corinthians tells us, they simply lose their significance and their pursuer becomes merely a 'sounding gong', or a 'tinkling cymbal' (1 Cor. 13:1; see Cottingham 2012, esp. Section 4). The acknowledged saint is one who carries that love to a degree of devotion and self-sacrifice that fills most of us with awe. But every human being, if the theistic vision is true, is called to advance as far as may be possible along that path. For our lives, on this vision, are not blank slates to be filled in as we happen to choose, but are governed by a cosmic teleology: like it or not, we are oriented towards a final supreme end—the good whose principal nature is love. The saintly life is one that grasps, in thought and action, where true human blessedness lies.

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# CHAPTER 6

# AUTHORITY IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

LINDA T. ZAGZEBSKI

## Introduction

Joseph Raz's well-known Normal Justification thesis (NJ thesis) is a general principle for the defence of authority that rests on the modern liberal assumption that the ultimate authority over the self is the self. Briefly, the thesis says that the normal way to show that some putative authority A has authority over S is to show that S is more likely to act on her own reasons if she does what A tells her to do rather than to try to act directly on those reasons (Raz 1988: 53). In Zagzebski (2012), I argued for several analogues of Raz's thesis, some of which apply to epistemic authority, and some of which apply to authority in communities, including the complex, temporally extended communities that we call traditions. Authority in these communities often combines epistemic and practical authority. The conclusion of my argument is that it is possible to defend authority in traditional communities on the same general grounds as Raz uses to defend the authority of the state in the context of modern liberalism. Ironically, a modern liberal defence can be given for authority in some communities generally regarded as premodern or even anti-modern in structure, such as the Catholic Church or monastic communities. The acceptance of authority in these cases is compatible with autonomy.

In what follows I will show how the Razian approach to the defence of authority can be plausibly generalized. I will proceed in the first person, from the point of view of the individual person who wants to know whether he or she should accept the authority of a community. There are some interesting differences between a defence of authority from a person's own perspective and a defence from an objective viewpoint, but if a putative authority satisfies a first person thesis, that is even more clearly compatible with autonomy than the satisfaction of a third-person thesis. In saying this, I am not defending autonomy as a value. My purpose is to show how authority in a community, including a traditional religious community, can be justified from the assumption that the ultimate authority is the self, an assumption that is perhaps the hallmark of modern moral and political thought. If adherents of autonomy have objections to religious authority, it cannot be on the grounds that such authority conflicts with autonomy.

Operating from within the first-person perspective allows us to direct our attention to the norms of self-direction. My position is that (i) a reflectively self-governing person aims to make her psychic states fit their objects—her beliefs true, her emotions fitting, her perceptions and memories veridical, etc., and (ii) her ultimate test that she has succeeded in making her psychic states fit their objects is that they fit each other. This is a generalization of the well-known problem of epistemic circularity. The problem as discussed in epistemology is that our attempt at reaching full reflective justification of our belief states ultimately bottoms out in trust in our epistemic faculties as a whole. That is because we have no way to test that any belief we have is true without using our belief-forming faculties again. We can sometimes test a belief acquired by one faculty (e.g. memory) by using another (e.g. perception), but we can never escape using our faculties as a whole. The same point applies to any psychic state that has an external object, including emotions. Our attempt at reaching full reflective justification for any such state bottoms out in trust in our faculties taken together. Since self-trust in our faculties in general is necessary, our only ultimate test that a psychic state of any kind fits its object is that it survives reflection when we are using our faculties as well as we can—what I call 'conscientiously'. By surviving reflection, I mean that after reflection upon our psychic states and the resolution of any conflict, the state survives. My position is that we want to have a self in which we reduce conflict between our psychic states. We want a harmonious self because not only is a harmonious self more satisfying than one that is not, but a self whose states survive reflection is one in which we have done the best we can do to make the states of the self fitting. Assuming that we aim to have beliefs that are true, perceptions that are veridical, and emotions that are fitting, it follows that we should govern ourselves in such a way that we attempt to make our psychic states survive conscientious self-reflection. (For a detailed defence of the argument of this paragraph, see Zagzebski 2012, Chs 2 and 4.)

I think that this norm is the most basic norm of rationality, but I will not talk about rationality in this chapter. I will propose a generalization of Raz's Normal Justification thesis that applies to both practical and epistemic authority, and which also assumes the principle that I want to govern myself in such a way that *I* judge that my states are correct upon reflection.

The thesis I propose is the following:

> **General Justification of Authority thesis (GJA)**
>
> The authority of another person is justified for me by my conscientious judgement that if I do what the authority directs (or believe what the authority tells me), the result will survive my own conscientious self-reflection better than if I try to figure out what to do/believe myself.

In the next section I will start by looking at authority in small communities and will argue that GJA is an appropriate extension of Raz's NJ thesis for the justification of authority in such communities. I will extend the argument to the authority of traditions in the following section, and will show how GJA can be applied to the authority of religious traditions. In each case the justification of authority is dictated by the norm of self-governance. There is nothing in GJA or in the application of GJA to communities that deviates from the underlying assumption of autonomy as used by Raz. I hope these arguments will lead to new lines of research on the epistemology of religious belief.

## AUTHORITY IN SMALL COMMUNITIES

Raz proposes the Normal Justification thesis in the course of giving the general contours of practical authority, but it is clear that he is interested in these theses for their application to the political domain and to the authority of law. I imagine that this means he is operating within certain constraints.

One constraint is the desire to maximize political freedom and to minimize political authority. Most modern political thought is motivated more by fear of bad authority than by desire for good authority. The idea is that it is more important to devise an account of authority that prevents tyranny than to give the bearer of authority the function of assisting the subjects in pursuing their individual and collective good. With such an aim, it is reasonable to restrict authority in a way that is compatible with having a tolerably smooth-functioning society.

A second constraint is that the account must be applicable to authority over large populations with no presumption of personal trust between authority and subject. The strong personal bonds that exist in small communities such as the family or village cannot be assumed when the authority is distant from the subjects, they have very different aims, and there is no personal interaction between them.

These constraints do not apply to practical authority in communities small enough to have communal ends and interpersonal relationships that bind the community together; nor does it apply to epistemic authority in such communities. Consider communities that exist for a well-defined purpose, such as building houses, performing orchestral works, or investigating homicides. These communities generally have leaders whose authority is defined by the purpose of the community. The subject of authority has reason to accept the authority's legitimacy because a condition for serving the purpose of the community is that there are subjects who obey the person in authority—the leader of the orchestra or homicide team, or the builder. The subject need not have reasons to act in a way that serves the community's purpose in advance of becoming a member of the community whose purpose she is serving. Authority in the community is justified by reference to the communal purpose, not reasons the subject has apart from her participation in the community. Of course, if the community is voluntary, she has reasons for joining it, but the legitimacy of the authority over her is not dependent upon her having those reasons.

For instance, I may have reasons to become a homicide detective in a certain city. If I become a member of a homicide team, I now participate in a community that has communal purposes, and the legitimacy of the authority in the community is justified by reference to those purposes, not to the purposes I had in joining. If I lose my reason for joining the team, I am still subject to its authority as long as I am a member. The same point applies to building houses and performing music. I have reasons to join an orchestra or to get a job building houses, but the authority of the orchestra director or the builder who hires me is not contingent upon the existence of those reasons. The person in authority can lose legitimacy, but not because of his relation to my reasons for belonging to the community. It is his relation to the community's reasons that matters.

The same point applies to authority in some communities that are not voluntary such as one's birth family. Authority in the family is not contingent upon reasons the child has for being a member of the family. In fact, one does not need reasons to be a member of a family, and it is not clear that it is even coherent to ask for reasons. But a family has communal purposes with reference to which the parents have legitimate authority.

This means that Raz's NJ thesis does not explain what justifies authority in certain communities. If authority in a community is justified by second-order reasons to think that obeying the authority makes it more likely that the members of the community will act on certain first-order reasons, it is often the *community*'s first-order reasons that are most relevant. As a member of the community, the community's reasons for acting are my reasons.

There is a second way that Raz's NJ thesis does not explain authority in small communities that contain a high degree of trust between authority and subject. It is sometimes reasonable for a subject to take the word of the authority as a reason to revise the first-order reasons for the sake of which she originally placed trust in the authority. This often happens in the relationship between teacher and student. The student believes that she will do a better job of reaching her goal of learning a subject if she follows the teacher's directions than if she attempts to learn on her own. So the teacher's authority is justified by the Normal Justification thesis. But one of the things the student can learn is that she should revise her understanding of the goals of study that she was serving in accepting the teacher as an authority. This often happens in learning philosophy since the student's initial goal is typically modelled on learning in information-based fields. So she may undertake a study of philosophy because she wants philosophical information. She wants to find out what the great philosophers thought. As she learns more philosophy, if she trusts what she learns, then what she trusts when she is conscientious gradually changes, and her trust in the teacher can make it reasonable for her to let the teacher's testimony about the goals of philosophy change the reasons she initially had for studying philosophy and accepting the teacher's authority. In this way it can be reasonable for her to accept a revision of her first-order reasons on the teacher's authority even though it was trust in the teacher's ability to aid her in acting on those reasons that led her to accept the authority of the teacher.

The teacher is closer to an exemplar than a leader of a team. There are communities in which the authority in the community is an exemplar who transmits a skill, an art, or a *techne* in Plato's sense. An exemplar's authority can be justified either by the subject's admiration for the exemplar and her trust in that emotion, or by the subject's reflective judgement that the exemplar has the qualities she trusts in herself in a greater degree than she has herself. But if the exemplar is teaching the subject how to play the cello or baseball, or how to practise law or do philosophy, the justification for the exemplar's authority is ultimately success in the subject's learning of the skill or art, or acquiring competence in the practice. This is one way that the future justifies the present.

The same point applies to a subject learning an entire way of life such as a new member of a monastic community. The *Rule of St Benedict* is not only a spiritual handbook but also a brilliant defence of Benedictine authority on grounds that a modern liberal would accept, even though it was written 1,500 years ago. Benedict begins with an appeal to those who are longing for 'days of real fulfillment' (Barry 2003: 11). Within the space of a few paragraphs, Benedict appeals to the monk's first-order reasons for living, and the monk's second-order reasons for thinking that living as a monk according to the *Rule* and under the direction of an abbot is a better way to live in the way he aims to live than to do it alone or to do it by becoming one of the other kinds of monks Benedict describes—a sarabaite or gyrovague, who have no abbot or no rule. So it appears to me that Benedictine authority satisfies Raz's Normal Justification thesis. But the Benedictine monk, like the philosophy student and most of us living outside a monastery, begins with only the vaguest idea of his ends and the first-order reasons upon which he should act. Benedict presents guidelines for Christian practice in Chapter Four of the *Rule*. Most of these rules are familiar to the monk and he has already accepted them; but some of them are new, and there would be no reason for Benedict to list them in detail and to prescribe that they be read aloud regularly if he did not think that the monk would not also accept these guidelines on the authority of the *Rule*. This is an example of an authority who identifies the individual's prior first-order ends, makes them specific, and adds to them in certain ways that the individual reasonably accepts on the word of the authority.

Benedictine authority illustrates a third limitation of the NJ thesis that I discuss in detail in Zagzebski 2010. What attracts the monk or potential monk to the *Rule* is its admirability and the admirability of its author. To imitate the *Rule* is most generally to try to become a certain kind of person. Putting oneself under the direction of the *Rule* is a better way to become that kind of person than to try to do it directly. But the end of becoming the kind of person proposed to the monk in the *Rule* need not be an end he has in advance of finding the *Rule* admirable. On the contrary, he might want to become that kind of person just because he finds the *Rule* admirable. So he could accept the authority of the *Rule* under an abbot because he sees that as the best way to become the kind of person that he wants to become, but he has that end because he trusts his admiration for the *Rule* that sets out for him that ideal. That indicates that trust in one's emotion of admiration can ground authority directly, aside from the fact that one has a second-order reason to think that obeying authority will serve one's first-order ends.

The monastic life is also a good example of my point that authority in the learning of a practice is justified by success in learning the practice, a success that the subject could not acquire without it. The success of monasticism as a practice over many hundreds of years and in many parts of the world is a justification of the authority structure that successfully produces monks who live the life they hoped to live. But what really justifies monks in accepting the authority structure of their abbey is not that they succeed in living a life they set out to live when they were novices, but that they succeed in living a life that survives their own future conscientious reflection on their life.

I have suggested four ways the NJ thesis does not explain what justifies authority in small communities containing a high degree of trust:

1. The community has communal ends, and authority can be justified by reference to those ends rather than the ends of the individual members of the community.
2. A member of a community can have reason to modify her first-order ends on the word of the authority.
3. Authority can be justified by the subject's trust in his admiration for the authority as an exemplar rather than by the authority's ability to help him act on his first-order ends.
4. Authority over a person learning a practice can be justified by the subject's success in learning the practice.

Raz's thesis anchors authority in the subject's reasons for action prior to and independent of reasons she acquires under the authority—an understandable constraint if Raz's ultimate aim is to justify political authority. In contrast, GJA anchors authority in the subject's reflective judgement, but not necessarily the subject's prior reflective judgement, or her judgement independent of trust in the authority. The subject's later reflective judgement can justify an earlier acceptance of authority.

Notice next that the ways in which authority in small communities differs from authority in the state also applies to epistemic authority in small communities.

First, there is epistemic authority in communities whose end is not epistemic or not wholly epistemic, and the epistemic authority can be justified by reference to the non-epistemic end. The end can be the transmission of a *techne* or skill or art, or a whole way of life, such as the life of Benedictine monasticism. Medicine, painting, baseball, playing the cello, and even home-building are practices transmitted from an expert in the practice to others who gradually acquire expertise through training in the practice. The subject has reason to believe what the authority tells her because that is a necessary condition for learning the practice. This is a point made by Simon (1991: Ch. 3), and also argued by Teichmann (2004). Epistemic authority is justified by a reasonable expectation that the authority will serve an end that is not necessarily epistemic or is only partly so. I would not deny that a student of the cello reasonably believes that what her teacher tells her about the proper way to hold the bow is probably true, and similarly for most of the other beliefs novices in a practice learn from their teachers, but finding out the truth about how to hold the bow is a means to an end—the end of learning how to play the cello well. What really justifies the student in taking beliefs on the teacher's authority is that that is what she conscientiously judges she should do if she wants to become a master of the practice. The same point applies to learning practices that engage her whole life such as the practice of the Christian life. She may adopt a complex set of ends, including union with God, and she judges that the best way to get to those ends is by accepting the beliefs as well as following the practical directions of an authority. Her justification for adopting these beliefs is that she conscientiously judges that her future reflection upon the beliefs in conjunction with other states of her self will be more harmonious if she follows the teacher's authority than if she does not.

Second, the example of the way authority operates in teaching philosophy shows how the subject sometimes needs to be taught the end, not just the means to the end, even when the practice is an epistemic practice. It can be reasonable for the student to modify her first-order reasons for the sake of which she consulted authority, and to do so on the word of the authority. So the philosophy student can learn that there is value in reading Plato apart from the historical interest that gave her a reason to study his work. She may discover that for herself, but she can also reasonably accept it on the teacher's authority.

Third, admiration for an epistemic exemplar can ground authority directly, and that can also explain why the subject might trust the authority more than her own judgement of the epistemic goals. If trust in oneself is more basic than the NJ thesis, that explains why it is sometimes rational to revise the reasons for accepting authority to which the NJ thesis refers on the basis of trust in that same authority, and it also explains why it can be reasonable to accept authority because of trusted features in the self other than beliefs about the authority. Epistemic admiration is one of those.

Fourth, in addition to communal practical ends like building homes and playing music, there are communal epistemic ends. As a member of a community, I have the goal to obtain truth for the community, to add to the community's stock of truths, as well as to increase the community's understanding of the truths we have. As members of a community, we do our conscientious best in getting the truth in some domain. We pool our resources—experiences, historical memory, data, interpretations—and have a system of authority as well as a division of labour.

I conclude that what Raz calls the normal way to justify authority is not a necessary condition for justified authority in certain communities. This is not an objection to Raz, who makes it clear that his NJ thesis does not give necessary conditions for authority, but GJA rectifies the inadequacies in the NJ thesis for small communities like the ones I have mentioned and is a natural extension of the NJ thesis. This point is important since there is both epistemic and non-epistemic authority in small communities, and in these communities it is the ways in which authority is not analogous to political authority that explains the way authority is justified.

## AUTHORITY IN TRADITIONS

Some communities are like an extended self. These communities can be based on a shared religion or political beliefs, geographical location, heredity, or other features that are closely tied to a person's sense of identity. Some of the communities I mentioned in the last section are not communities in the sense I mean here. An orchestra or a homicide team is not an extended self, although I would not deny that they could be in some circumstances. A rough test of whether a community is an extended self is the way its members refer to the community. If they always refer to it in the third person—for example 'the US', they are not a member of the community, and if everyone refers to it in the third person, it is not a community at all. If they refer to it in the first person plural, as 'We' and 'Us', that is an indication that they identify with the community in a way that makes conscientious reflection upon the community's beliefs and practical directives different from reflection upon the beliefs and directives of independent persons, and much closer to reflection on their own beliefs.

Since a community in the sense I mean is an extended self, it has many of the features of a person, and the persons who are its members relate to it in the same *sort* of way they relate to themselves, although of course it is not identical. A community has a communal consciousness with the same components upon which its members can reflect as individuals have when they engage in self-reflection. A community has a history of experiences; it has communal beliefs; it may have communal emotions expressed and fostered in the community's stories. It often has hopes and plans for the future. It has values. It often acts as an agent. It can later respond to its acts with reactive emotions such as remorse or pride, and it can express appreciation and gratitude to other communities. A member of the community will refer to these components of the community consciousness as 'our' experiences, beliefs, values, emotions, and so on, and its acts as 'our' acts.

What 'We' believe or prescribe is determined in different ways by different communities. A crucial decision that a community needs to make is the structure of authority it will accept. My position is that epistemic authority in a community is justified by the community's conscientious judgement that the community is more likely to get the truth or get beliefs that survive communal reflection if it comes to a belief by the method it chooses than by alternatives. The parallel point applies to practical authority in a community. In cases in which a community lasts a very long time, the method itself can be gradually developed by communal reflection, which means it is determined in part by the authority that has already been developed in the past.

In some communities the members trust the beliefs and decisions of a majority of its members more than those of any one person, and such communities will have an authority structure that is democratic. In these communities authority resides in the results of a procedure followed by the entire community rather than in a person or body of persons invested with the authority to protect, develop, and transmit what 'We' believe within the current community and to its future members. But other communities have different structures. A community is less likely to adopt a democratic structure when the community lasts for many generations, since a democratic structure of authority favours the present over the past. But whatever authority structure a community adopts, it is justified by the communal judgement that We are more likely to reach our ends if we use our authority structure than if we attempt some other method. This is a judgement we make when we are conscientious. It is justified by our communal conscientiousness in the same way my individual judgement justifying my acceptance of authority is justified by my personal conscientiousness. So the question that arises within a community of how to identify and justify authority within the community is different from the individual member's question of whether her acceptance of the community's authority is justified for her.

When I accept the community as an extended self, I acquire reasons to believe what my extended self believes and to do what my extended self says to do. The justification of the community's beliefs and practical directions is the community's conscientiousness. The justification of my acceptance of the authority of the community is the fact that my acceptance of my community survives my own critical self-reflection. I can in this way acquire reasons to act or believe on the authority of my community.

Religious communities are an important kind of community in this sense. They can have the features I have identified in small communities with a high degree of trust, yet they can also be very large, even larger than many nation states, and a great many of their members may have as weak a degree of trust in the authority of the community as members of a large political state. So the justification-of-authority thesis I am proposing does not necessarily apply to everyone who considers themselves a member of a religious community such as the Catholic Church, but I think that it is this thesis that justifies the acceptance of a strong kind and degree of authority for some people, and as such, it is an interesting extension of the kind of approach Raz uses in justifying the authority of the political state to a kind of authority that most people assume cannot be defended on the assumptions of political liberalism. The thesis I propose is the following:

> **Justification of Religious Authority thesis (JRA)**
>
> The authority of my religious community is justified for me by my conscientious judgement that if I engage in the community, following its practical directives and believing its teachings, the result will survive my conscientious self-reflection upon my total set of psychic states better than if I try to figure out what to do and believe in the relevant domain in a way that is independent of Us.

I want to stress that in reflecting upon my total set of psychic states and attempting to make them harmonious with each other, I am doing the only thing I can do to make my beliefs true and my actions appropriate for my ends. If my beliefs survive reflection after changes in my experiences and other psychic states, that is as close to confirmation of their truth as it is possible to get. When I conscientiously judge that engaging in a religious community and adopting its beliefs will survive my future reflection better than if I formed my beliefs in a way that is independent of the community, the authority of my community for me is justified by my ultimate test of the rationality of any of my beliefs and actions.

An important function of a religious community is to preserve and transmit a tradition. What is preserved and transmitted is often the subject of dispute within the community because changes in what is transmitted can serve the ends for which the tradition was created. So, for example, it can serve the ends for which the US Constitution was written to alter the Constitution at some points in history. The same thing applies to the interpretation of sacred texts. In describing traditional Judaism, James Kugel (2007) argues that the idea of the Bible arose in the period of the ancient interpreters of the Jewish scriptures living at the end of the biblical period. What is transmitted from them is not what was originally written; it is a tradition that transmits and deepens the understanding by each generation of the definitive Oral Torah given by the ancient interpreters. Similarly, in Catholic Christianity, the Apostolic age is recognized as a high point of revelation in the past from which the tradition proceeds. This pattern of a gradual development that reaches a high point and is then transmitted to the future in a way that prioritizes the high point can also be found in traditions that are not religious. An example is the practice of Italian glassmaking. By the sixteenth century, Venetian glass makers on the island of Murano reached a level that arguably has never been surpassed, and although their secrets were eventually discovered by glassmakers in other places, the master glassmakers in Venice continue to make glass in the style and technique they perfected centuries ago. Arguably, the performance of classical music and the practice of cooking in Michelin three-star restaurants in France transmit tradition in the same way. The musical performance or preparation of the culinary dish is not intended to be identical to those produced in the past since the cultural context gradually changes, but the changes are only those needed to keep the tradition alive as it was at its best. Authority in these traditions is intended to serve the purpose of ensuring that the tradition is perpetuated and changes only for reasons that are compatible with the reasons for creating the tradition. Of course, I am speaking here in a very abstract and idealistic level, but it seems to me that Raz is right that that is the level at which we should begin our reflections on the justification of authority.

Religious communities can have all of the features that I identified in small communities, even though many of them are very large:

1. The community has communal ends, and authority can be justified by reference to those ends rather than by the ends of the individual members of the community. For instance, the image of the church as the Body of Christ leads to ends for the church as an organic whole, and that organic whole also has ends for persons outside the church—to bring them into communion with the church, and to aid their salvation. As a member of the church, these ends can justify both the teaching authority of the church, which is epistemic, and the practical authority, which governs behaviour. Since the church's ends are my ends, this epistemic and practical authority is justified for me.

2. A member of a community can have reason to modify his first-order ends on the word of the authority. The Christian life involves adopting an awareness of other persons as organically connected to oneself. That leads to moral directives which are often intended to modify the subject's first-order ends, typically in the direction of becoming less self-centred.
3. Authority can be justified by the subject's trust in his admiration for the authority as an exemplar rather than by the authority's ability to help him act on his first-order ends. The admirability of sacred texts is an example of this. The admirability of Christian saints is another. Our recognition of an exemplar gives us a reason to treat the person as authoritative in the domain of their admirability. What makes Pope Francis authoritative is not only his status as Pope, but also his personal holiness. Only members of the Catholic community will treat the former as a justification for taking him as an authority, but many people outside the church reasonably take him as authoritative in many ways because of the admirable qualities they recognize in him as a person.
4. Authority over a person learning a practice can be justified by the subject's success in learning the practice. Very few people can justifiably claim success in living as a Christian if that means consistently obeying all Christian teachings, but many are successful if the Christian life includes practices of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. From a first-person standpoint, the acceptance of authority is justified by one's judgement that the authority aids in living one's life as one conscientiously judges it should be lived. From a third-person standpoint, we can compare lives lived under the authority of a particular community with lives that are not under the authority. Our conscientious judgement of which life we would rather live can confirm or disconfirm the justification of the authority of such a community.

I said earlier that Raz's interest in defending political authority constrained his account of authority in general. The citizens of a modern political state do not constitute a collective body in any robust sense. Political authority is the minimum kind and degree of authority needed for civic functionality. But Raz's thesis arises from a view of self-governance that does not specify what the ends of the self are and what the self judges when it governs itself. For many selves, membership in a religious community is partially constitutive of the self, and the authority of the community is justified by the requirements of self-governance.

The General Justification of Authority thesis (GJA) applies to both communities and individuals. Authority for a community is justified by the community's conscientious judgement that following the authority satisfies the thesis for the community. The justification of authority for me is that it helps me believe and act in ways that will withstand my self-reflective scrutiny. If an authority shows me how to go about reflection in a way that survives critical self-scrutiny better than I could do on my own, the authority has helped me attain a higher level of integrity of the self. If I reflectively judge that the authority will help me in that way, my acceptance of the authority is justified by my own principle of self-governance. I am justified in accepting the authority of a community on the same grounds. When the community is an extended self, as religious communities often are, acceptance of authority in the community is an extension of the authority of the self.

## The Epistemology of Religious Authority

Authority within a religious community has almost always been defended by reference to scriptures, religious experiences, or teachings internal to the community—for example, that Christ founded the church, that God spoke to Moses on Sinai, or that Sharia law was revealed to Mohammed. Many modern philosophers find these ways of justifying religious authority an embarrassment for those who accept it because they are so obviously circular. But if I am right that our only way to tell that any psychic state fits its object is survival of conscientious reflection over time, there is nothing wrong with such a defence of authority under the assumption that the justifying belief survives a believer's reflections upon the belief, given her degree of trust in non-believers and in other believers, her experiences, memories, emotions, and values. She is doing the same thing any believer must do no matter who the believer is and no matter what the content of the belief is. But I have also argued that even if we grant the modern philosopher the assumption that the justification of any kind of authority must proceed from the position that the ultimate authority over the self is the self, religious authority can still be justified. The Justification of Religious Authority thesis (JRA) is a principle that follows directly from the norm of self-governance. It is a generalization of Raz's justification thesis that can be straightforwardly applied to the epistemic domain and to the moral domain. Authority in most religious communities combines authority over certain beliefs and authority over a range of acts. JRA justifies authority over both, and shows how religious authority is compatible with autonomy.

Epistemology has taken a social turn in recent decades. That is good news for the future of religious epistemology. For too long, religious epistemology tracked the individualism of secular epistemology. The focus was on the individual's religious experience, basic beliefs, and evidence for her beliefs. Recently, our epistemic dependence on others has received attention in the testimony literature. We should welcome the attention to chains of belief transmission, but I hope that there will be more attention given to the networking of beliefs in communities, and the importance of epistemic trust in those communities. The structure of the process by which beliefs are dispersed within a community and continue through the future life of the community needs epistemological models. One such model is the extension of John Henry Newman's idea of the illative sense to communities, as described by Frederick Aquino (2004: Ch. 4). Newman thinks of the illative sense as a cognitive ability that operates in the domain of belief in a way that parallels Aristotle's view on the operation of practical wisdom in the domain of acts. Aquino proposes that the development of the illative sense within a community requires training under the tutelage of exemplars of informed judgement. I have argued that intellectual exemplars can meet the conditions for authority, and I hope that there will be future work on the place of intellectual exemplars in the development and transmission of the beliefs within a religious community.

I have argued in this chapter that JRA applies to both the way an individual should justify her beliefs and the way a community should justify its beliefs. Since the community is like a person, a self-governing community undergoes conscientious reflection as a community and its beliefs and prescriptions respond to changes in communal experience and reflection over time. Conscientious communal reflection can also lead to alterations in the authority structure it accepts. The norm for accepting an authority structure is the same as the norm for accepting a belief: the community judges that it is more likely to reach its ends by adopting that structure than by adopting an alternative.

Communities have a division of epistemic labour in undergoing these reflections. Historians and scripture scholars have assigned roles. Church leaders have a teaching role as well as a role in dialogue with other communities. Theologians within the community take the lead on the internal reflections of the community, and philosophers have a different role in clarifying and criticizing the areas of communal belief that overlap secular philosophy. Different ecclesial structures are developed in response to the need to coordinate the results of these different contributors in the communal consciousness.

The historical experience of authority in the centuries leading up to the modern period was tumultuous, resulting in an almost total lack of trust in authority of any kind. Moral and religious authority disappeared in a wide swath of the West, and political authority was accepted only grudgingly and in the weakest form necessary to prevent societal collapse. The effect on philosophical and theological defences of religious authority was devastating. Most writers assumed they had to choose between a premodern defence of authority or a modern perspective that made authority virtually obsolete. I have argued that we can have it both ways.

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## CHAPTER 7

# THE INNER WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

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SOME writers of the Jewish and Christian scriptures speak abundantly of the 'Spirit' (*ruach* in Hebrew, *pneuma* in Greek) of God and of this Spirit's interventions in human experience. They do not offer a detailed metaphysics, or ontology, of the Spirit, but they often characterize this Spirit functionally, as *God in action*, with distinctive power. The kinds of power characteristic of the Spirit of God are diverse and sometimes subtle, but they share the feature of serving God's purposes in action. Some of these divine purposes include witnessing to humans regarding who God is and what God expects of humans. We find the work, witness, and power of God's Spirit illustrated widely in the Old and New Testaments. Accordingly, we can illuminate the present topic by giving attention to these writings.

Our main interest now is in the 'inner witness' of the Spirit of God. Something is a witness only if it is a witness *to something*; that is, only if it indicates (perhaps fallibly) the reality of something. God's Spirit might witness *to* a feature of God's moral character by presenting divine *agapē* to a person, say in that person's conscience. This witness would not be reducible to the Spirit's witnessing *that* God manifests *agapē*. The latter witness would be *de dicto* in virtue of its having propositional content (namely, a *that* clause), whereas the former witness would be *de re* in virtue of its presenting the reality in question, with no *required* propositional content, even if a *that* clause happens to be present. Analogously, I could present you with the red card in my pocket without presenting any propositional content, or I could witness to you *that* I have a red card in my pocket. I also could do both but this does not challenge the conceptual distinction at hand.

Witnessing *to* something need not be witnessing *that* something is the case. Otherwise, the familiar distinction between *showing* (or, manifesting) and *telling* (or, describing) would collapse, and simple experiential witnessing would be lost. Typically, talk of divine 'testimony' includes a notion of divine 'telling', but witnessing does not reduce to telling. We shall return to this topic, but we need now to gather some relevant evidence.

## Some Biblical Evidence

The book of Job captures a recurring Old Testament theme about God's Spirit as the sustainer of human life: 'If [God] should take back his spirit to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and all mortals return to dust' (Job 34:14–15, NRSV, here and in subsequent biblical translations; cf. Ps. 104:29–30). In addition, the book of Job represents the biblical theme that the Spirit of God gives understanding to humans, as follows: 'truly it is the spirit in a mortal, the breath of the Almighty, that makes for understanding' (Job 32:8; cf. Dt. 34:9). Combining these two themes, we may say that God's Spirit sustains human life as a life of understanding, or wisdom. Insofar as understanding and wisdom have epistemic import, the Old Testament writings in question identify such import for God's Spirit. This theme is absent from purely secular approaches to epistemic import.

The Old Testament characterization of God's Spirit takes on a profound moral and spiritual significance with the following remark from the psalmist: 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me' (Ps. 51:10–11). The psalmist also prays to God: 'Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit' (Ps. 51:12), thus suggesting an important connection between the presence of God's holy Spirit and a human spirit *willing to cooperate* with God's salvation of humans. This indicates the redemptive importance of the presence of God's holy Spirit, beyond the mere sustenance of human life and understanding. The notion of a *willing spirit*, we shall see, plays an important role in the inner witness of God's Spirit and thereby in the epistemic role of the Spirit.

The book of Ezekiel offers a prophecy concerning Israel: 'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances' (Ez. 36:26–7). This promise links reception of the Spirit of God with obedience to God's commands. It thus reiterates the psalmist's connection between receiving God's Spirit and having a 'willing spirit' towards God. Given the role of human obedience in redemption by God, the present promise has significant value for the redemption of humans. The Spirit-empowered obedience in question is part of what Ezekiel anticipates in his vision of the valley of dry bones, in which God promises to Israel: 'I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act' (Ez. 37:14). God's Spirit thus brings new life with God, even life from the dead, whereby humans relate obediently to God. In addition, the Spirit contributes to human knowing that God has spoken and will act.

God's Spirit not only brings new life with God to humans, but also *witnesses* to the reality of such life for humans. Various writers of the New Testament suggest this view, and we can benefit from attention to their contributions. According to the earliest Jesus movement, Jesus Christ as God's risen representative is still present among his human followers. His presence is no longer in his earthly body, but is instead in his Spirit abiding in the hearts, the volitional and affective centres, of his disciples. This Spirit, the 'Holy Spirit', is the Spirit of Jesus and of his divine Father. As a result, many New Testament writers elucidate pneumatology with Christology, given that God's Spirit is to be understood in terms of the crucified and risen Christ. New Testament Christology, including the character of Christ, gives some definite contours to the understanding of God's Spirit.

A recurring theme of the New Testament is that Jesus, as God's unique representative, would baptize his followers with the Spirit of God (Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Mt. 3:11; Jn. 1:33; Acts 1:4–5, 11:16). In doing so, Jesus would bring people into reconciliation and fellowship with God, in God's kingdom family. As indicated, Peter finds the prophecy of Joel 2:28 to be fulfilled in the Pentecost experience of Acts 2, and he credits the risen Jesus as the source of the fulfilment: 'This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear' (Acts 2:32–3). According to the four canonical Gospels and Acts, then, the risen Jesus has the authority and the power to give people the Spirit of God and thereby to make them renewed members of God's kingdom. The book of Acts clarifies, with due amazement, that this gift of the Spirit was not limited to Jewish believers but extended also to Gentiles who believe in Christ as Lord (Acts 10:44–8, 11:15–18).

The Gospel of Luke (4:18–19) portrays Jesus as announcing the fulfilment of Isaiah 61:1–2 in his own ministry. God's Spirit anoints Jesus to bring good news to the poor along with the power of freedom to live cooperatively with God (see also Acts 10:38). In this way, God's Spirit witnesses to God's reality and character through Jesus as God's beloved son (Mk. 1:9–11; Lk. 3:21–2; Mt. 3:16–17). This is a divine witness through a historical human being, and it thereby replaces abstract talk of 'divine spirit' with concrete talk of a particular human life that exemplifies the Spirit of God. The contours for the witness of God's Spirit thus become more definite and identifiable in the person and life of Jesus. This witness thereby takes on a definite epistemic role concerning the reality and the action of God.

We can clarify the nature of the Spirit's witness by attending to the relevant good news and power in connection with some remarks from Paul and John on God's Spirit. Paul uses the following language interchangeably at times: 'the Spirit of God', 'the Spirit of Christ', and 'Christ' (see Rom. 8:9–11). In keeping with this usage, Paul thinks of Jesus as having become at his resurrection a 'life-giving Spirit' (1 Cor. 15:45) and connects the life of God's Spirit with 'righteousness', thereby linking it to God's moral character (see Rom. 8:2, 4, 10; cf. Rom. 5:18, 21).

In agreement with some of Paul's remarks, John's Gospel represents the coming of God's Spirit as the coming of the risen Jesus. It also represents Jesus as being in an authoritative position to control the sending of God's Spirit to humans. For instance, John's Jesus remarks to his disciples: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.

This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you' (Jn. 14:15–18). In the coming of God's Spirit to people, then, Jesus himself comes. In addition, this Spirit witnesses for Jesus, in an epistemically significant manner: 'When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify [i.e. witness, *marturēsei*] on my behalf' (Jn. 15:26; cf. 1 Jn. 5:9, 11). The Spirit of God, according to John and Paul, is as much the Spirit of Jesus as the Spirit of his Father. This suggests that the power of God's Spirit is inherently the power of self-sacrificial *agapē* exemplified in the obedient, crucified Jesus. Given this lesson, we should not separate the character of God's Spirit from the self-sacrificial character of the crucified Jesus, as Paul emphasizes in various contexts (Gal. 3:10–14, 1 Cor. 2:2–5, 13:1–13).

## WITNESS TO DIVINE FILIAL *AGAPĒ*

Even if the risen Jesus assumed an authoritative role in manifesting and sending God's Spirit to humans, we should ask what the main point of the Spirit's witness is. A hint is found in Jesus's filial use of the term '*Abba*' ('Father') for God and in the subsequent use of this Aramaic term in the Greek writings of Paul and in the Greek Gospel of Mark (Mk. 14:36).

Paul introduces the filial theme to the Galatian Christians by using the Aramaic language of Jesus: 'when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"' (Gal. 4:4–6). The Spirit of the risen Jesus, then, epistemically confirms one's being a child of God with the cry 'Abba! Father!' Paul makes a closely related point to the Roman Christians, as follows: 'you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with (*summarturei*) our spirit that we are children of God' (Rom. 8:15–16). This filial language of Paul, in the wake of Jesus, indicates that the Spirit of God seeks to witness, in an epistemically important manner, not only to God's reality and faithfulness, but also to one's having become (or, at least, one's becoming) a cooperative child of the living God. This position is distinctive in giving God's Spirit a central role in epistemically confirming God's reality and work.

Paul thinks of the human reception of the Spirit of God as God's way of now providing a guarantee, or a down payment, for the future realization of God's redemptive promises. The guarantee is epistemic, courtesy of God's Spirit. Paul writes as follows to the Corinthian Christians: 'it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment' (2 Cor. 1:22; see also 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:13–14). This view suggests that the witness of the Spirit is eschatological, because the presence of the Spirit, like the kingdom of God, has not fully arrived yet. As a result, the Spirit points to the fullness of God's future, for which one can hope, even hope on the basis of a distinctive ground in one's experience.

Of course, we do not yet apprehend the full perfection of God's presence among humans. One can experience, however, the 'first fruits of the Spirit', according to Paul: 'we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8:23). Paul states a related eschatological point as follows: 'through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness' (Gal. 5:5). He holds that in an important sense the disciples of Jesus have already received, as a gracious gift, righteousness from God, reconciliation with God, and adoption into God's family (Rom. 3:21–6, 5:11, 8:14–16; Gal. 3:7, 4:4–7). Even so, redemption is *now realized in part* but *not yet fully realized*, owing in part to the future redemption of human bodies. As a result, eschatological hope in God awaits the completion of God's redemption for humans (Rom. 8:24–5). The witness of God's Spirit is, accordingly, partly eschatological, owing to its pointing to God's future completion of redemptive promises. As a result, the epistemic confirmation from God's Spirit awaits fullness in the future.

Paul and John, among other New Testament writers, portray the reception of God's Spirit (and the accompanying witness of the Spirit to becoming God's child) as requiring a definite human response to God's intervention in Christ. Paul remarks on this matter directly to the Galatian Christians: 'Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or [instead] by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? … [I]n Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham [would] come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith' (Gal. 3:2–4, 14). Paul, then, holds that one receives God's Spirit by responding in faith, or trust, to God's redemptive intervention in Christ. Insofar as God's Spirit brings epistemic confirmation of God's reality and work, this confirmation can depend on human receptivity towards God's Spirit.

The writer of John's Gospel links faith in Christ directly with the reception of God's Spirit. For instance, John's Jesus announces: 'As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water". Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive' (Jn. 7:38–9). John, like Paul, understands faith in God and Jesus to include obedience to God and Jesus. As a result, John makes a similar point about receiving God's Spirit in terms of obedience. As noted, he portrays Jesus as saying:

> If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.
>
> (Jn. 14:15–17)

Like Paul, then, John understands the reception of God's Spirit to emerge from the human response of obedient faith in God and Christ. He also acknowledges the epistemic significance of this response.

We can isolate some distinctive features of the filial relation that emerges from the human reception of God's Spirit via faith. We may understand this relation in terms of a goal regarding moral character: namely, 'like parent, like child'. On the assumption that Christ is 'the image of God' (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15), Paul identifies God's goal that humans 'be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family' (Rom. 8:29). Writing to the Corinthian Christians, Paul makes a closely related point in terms of 'the Lord, the Spirit': 'all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit' (2 Cor. 3:18). We need not digress to ontological questions about the exact relation between 'the Lord' and 'the Spirit' in Paul's thought. The point at hand is that the work of God's Spirit includes the transformation of humans into the image of Christ, who is 'the image of God'. This transformation, we shall see, has definite epistemic significance.

The image of God in Christ has distinctive moral and spiritual features. A central feature is exemplified in the self-sacrificial *agapē* of the crucified Jesus. Paul highlights this feature not only in his classic chapter on *agapē*, 1 Corinthians 13, but also in his letter to the Roman Christians. A crucially important passage on the witness of God's Spirit is the following: 'we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (Rom. 5:3–5; cf. 2 Cor. 5:14). This passage captures a central feature of the 'inner witness' of God's Spirit, because it identifies the work of God's Spirit in relaying a central feature of God's moral character to the volitional and affective centre of humans (their 'hearts'). This is an 'inner' work, but it is not a matter of merely subjective opinion; nor is it beyond describing (Paul just described it). In addition, it has definite epistemic import in grounding hope and belief in God.

Paul does not relinquish in the previous passage a central role for God's witness through the crucified Christ. The passage is followed by this remark: 'God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us'. God's witness to his *agapē* for humans in the cross of Christ does not depend on any mere human receiving an inner witness from God. Instead, the inner witness manifests in a human's 'heart' the kind of *agapē* that motivated Christ to obey God's call to the cross, in order to 'prove' God's love for humans. (On the role of obedience in Christ's undergoing crucifixion, see Phil. 2:8.) We might think of the cross of Christ as a divine witness that is outer in that it is not itself, as a spatiotemporal historical event, relayed to a human heart. Historical events that are spatiotemporally finite or bounded are not themselves relayed, strictly speaking, to any other spatiotemporal situation, even if *descriptions* of them are. In any case, the witness of the historical cross of Christ, as a spatiotemporal historical event, was not inner to any mere human, even if the *message* of the cross and the divine *agapē* conveyed by the cross can become inner, in virtue of being relayed to a human heart.

We should distinguish two kinds of inner witness of the Spirit in virtue of two kinds of 'being relayed' for the message and the *agapē* of the cross of Christ. The message and the *agapē* of the cross can be *cooperatively* relayed, and they can be *uncooperatively* relayed.

They are cooperatively relayed if and only if they are relayed to an intended recipient in a manner whereby that recipient cooperatively receives them. By contrast, they are uncooperatively relayed to an intended recipient if and only if they are relayed to an intended recipient in a manner whereby that recipient does not cooperatively receive them. Accordingly, an inner witness of the Spirit to an intended recipient need not be cooperatively received by that intended recipient. In particular, humans can reject the Spirit's inner witness to the message and the *agapē* of the cross of Christ. In that case, humans will exclude themselves from important evidence from God's Spirit.

Humans can exhibit varying degrees of cooperatively receiving the message and the *agapē* of the cross of Christ. Some people may cooperate more than others in receiving, for various reasons. This fact allows, however, for there being a definite threshold of volitional cooperation for one's cooperatively receiving the message and the *agapē* of the cross of Christ. The threshold arguably includes one's committing oneself *as a priority* to cooperation with God's message and *agapē*. (We need not settle the details of the nature of such commitment here.) Accordingly, people can be responsible to God for how they respond to the inner witness of the Spirit. As agents, they can exercise their will to cooperate with, reject, or withhold judgement on the inner witness. This allows for a volitional element in one's receiving or not receiving evidence from the Spirit of God; so, one's epistemic position relative to God can involve volitional tendencies beyond intellectual reflection.

Paul's suggestion of the distinctive cognitive, or evidential, role of the Spirit's witness is widely neglected. Attention to this role will clarify the nature of the Spirit's inner witness. Paul says, concerning people who respond in faith to God, that God's *agapē* is poured out into their hearts through the Spirit. In addition, Paul says that hope in God does not disappoint these people because this *agapē* has been poured out into their hearts. Paul would say the same of *faith* in God, given that he began Romans 5 with the importance of faith in God, and he regards faith and hope as very closely interconnected, so much so that he remarks that 'in hope we were saved' (Rom. 8:24). He holds, then, that neither hope nor faith in God disappoints the Roman Christians, because they have received God's supporting *agapē* in their hearts, courtesy of the Spirit.

The experienced *agapē* is evidential in virtue of indicating the reality and character of God; it is therefore epistemically significant. Paul's idea in Romans 5:5 includes a notion of psychological disappointment, but not just of psychological disappointment. He is saying more than that the Roman Christians are not psychologically disappointed by their hope in God. Given their experience of God's powerful *agapē* in their hearts, the Roman Christians had received inner *evidence* of God's reality, and therefore they are not cognitively, evidentially, or epistemically disappointed. The Spirit witnesses to God's reality and moral character via divine *agapē* poured into a cooperative human's heart, and this witness includes distinctive experiential evidence received by such a human. The directly experienced *agapē* from God, in Paul's view, saves one from cognitive or epistemic disappointment in hope and faith in God, because one thereby has a cognitive base, or epistemic foundation, from God for one's hope and faith in God.

The divine *agapē* in question is God's *compassionate will* to bring about what is morally and spiritually best for cooperative humans. Humans who refuse to cooperate block the power (and the epistemic significance) of this *agapē* for themselves, because it is not coercive of human wills. When humans cooperatively receive divine *agapē*, however, they are transformed towards the moral and spiritual character of God in Christ. In being thus transformed, humans receive distinctive evidence of God's reality and character. Specifically, in cooperatively responding to God's intervention, one finds God's will within oneself (if imperfectly), particularly God's will to love others, even enemies. In addition, one can be surprised by this new reality of *agapē* within oneself, given that it marks a discernible change from one's previous inclinations, especially towards one's enemies.

The evidence from the relevant divine *agapē* is inner, given its presentation directly to the heart, or will, of humans. It is not, however, purely subjective, because it does not depend just on human desires, intentions, beliefs, hopes, or feelings. In addition, this *agapē*, when cooperatively received, yields and involves a distinctive life direction, a Christward direction, we might say. A human life with this direction is a Christ-shaped life, given its being formed by the Spirit of Christ (Gal. 4:19). Paul thinks of this formation as empowered by the Spirit of God and Christ. One can see, from a suitably well-positioned perspective of cooperation with God, the salient reality of Christ-shaped lives in such disciples as the apostle Paul, Francis of Assisi, and Mother Teresa. It would be a mistake to call the reality of these lives purely subjective or illusory. The disciples in question have become life-sized evidence of the reality of God and God's empowering Spirit. In addition, this opportunity to become such living evidence is available to all disciples of Christ, even if its realization demands considerable human resolve and obedience towards God.

The Johannine writings in the New Testament agree with Paul's emphasis on the role of *agapē* in the Spirit's witness. For instance, the writer of 1 John states: 'No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit' (1 Jn. 4:12–13). The key idea here is that God's *agapē* is being realized and perfected in humans who are cooperative with this *agapē*, and the Spirit of God empowers such change and thereby supplies distinctive evidence of God's reality and character. The author of 1 John links this idea to knowing God, as follows: 'Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love' (1 Jn. 4:7–8).

*Agapē*, according to 1 John, has its source in God, not in humans, and human cooperative participation in it is necessary for knowing God, given God's inherently loving character. Humans come to know God by knowing God's character of love, and human participation in God's love is the main avenue to knowing God's character. The writer of 1 John also sounds a note similar to Paul's on confident hope in God: 'Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world' (1 Jn. 4:17). We may read this remark to agree with Paul's idea that inner *agapē* from God epistemically grounds a disciple's confident hope in God's future completion of redemption.

An important theme in John's Gospel is that the witness of God's Spirit includes convicting humans regarding their waywardness from God's character of perfect *agapē*. For instance, that author attributes the following remark to Jesus: 'It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement' (Jn. 16:7–8). This convicting work, according to John's Gospel, aims to witness to God's character of *agapē* and to invite humans to cooperate with it, in faithful obedience. Because this *agapē* is inherently unselfish and servant-like, it is self-sacrificial and, in that regard, kenotic. 1 John 3:16 connects *agapē* with self-sacrifice directly: 'We know love by this, that he [Jesus] laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another'. The Spirit's witness, then, points to and manifests divine *agapē* and thereby involves the kind of agapeic self-sacrifice found in the cross of Christ. In doing so, the Spirit provides evidence of God's reality and character.

Paul agrees with the implication of the Johannine writings that God's Spirit empowers a robust moral life for cooperative humans (Rom. 8:2–4). Paul thinks of 'the Spirit of life in Christ' as the Spirit of righteous life in Christ. This life requires that people 'walk … according to the Spirit', that is, in cooperation with the Spirit. Even so, Paul opposes any human means for supposedly earning, or meriting, God's approval or righteousness, such as by the Mosaic law or any other law (Rom. 4:2, 9:31–2).

Paul holds that an aim of the cross of Christ and the guiding Spirit of God in Christ is that 'the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us'. We may understand this as a call to be conformed to God's moral character as represented in the law as 'fulfilled' by the obedient Christ. This reading fits not only with Paul's emphasis on human righteousness via Christ and his Spirit (Rom. 5:21; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Cor. 3:16) but also with a central lesson on righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt. 5:17–18, 20). It also fits with Paul's view that divine grace works 'through righteousness' (Rom. 5:21). The witness of the Spirit, then, is inseparable from a witness to God's righteousness available to humans without their earning it. That is, it is inseparable from a witness to the gift of divine grace.

Paul thinks of the inner witness of the Spirit as including the inner intercession of the Spirit in prayer to God (Rom. 8:26–7). Paul understands this intercession as experiential, and not abstract or distant, for cooperative humans. The 'sighs too deep for words' are within a person who has received God's Spirit, and are thus part of the inner witness of the Spirit. These sighs witness, in an epistemic manner, to God's profound redemptive intervention in a person's experience, even if they are too deep for words. They qualify as experiential evidence of God's intervention for a recipient, as they are not produced by that recipient but indicate the presence of God's Spirit.

The sighs in question include eschatological groanings originating from God's Spirit. Accordingly, as indicated, Paul remarks: 'not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8:23). He regards this groaning as part of the 'pains of childbirth' (Rom. 8:22; cf. Gal. 4:19). We may think of this inward groaning as co-groaning with the Spirit of God, who witnesses through the depth of this groaning for eschatological redemption, for the fullness of redemption. This inner witness is to God's character of faithful redemption towards humans.

The eschatological theme in question also emerges from Paul's understanding of the Spirit's relation to the resurrection of humans. Paul writes: 'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you' (Rom. 8:11). The Spirit, then, empowers God's resurrection of humans, including Jesus. Paul acknowledges a sense in which Christians already have been 'raised with Christ' (Col. 3:1; Rom. 6:4, 11; Eph. 2:5, 6). We might call this 'spiritual resurrection' by the Spirit to new life with Christ now; it precedes the bodily resurrection promised to disciples of Christ. The Spirit witnesses to the present reality of this new spiritual life for Christians. Even so, the fullness of new life awaits bodily resurrection, and this calls for an eschatological witness from the Spirit and for human hope in God as faithful to complete redemptive promises. We can now highlight the epistemic role of God's Spirit.

## DIVINE SELF-MANIFESTATION AND SELF-AUTHENTICATION

Our overview of the Spirit's witness yields a portrait of God's way of authenticating God's reality and character for humans. This way is *self*-authentication, because it includes God's *self*-manifesting the divine moral character to cooperative humans, perhaps in their conscience, via the intervening Spirit. It also includes God's producing traits of this divine character, such as divine *agapē*, in the experiences and lives of cooperative recipients. God, then, can be self-evidencing and self-authenticating towards humans, given God's Spirit who self-manifests God's unique, morally perfect character. This view does not entail the implausible view that a subjective human experience is self-authenticating regarding God's existence. It entails instead that God is an independent moral agent who is the ultimate source of *agapē*, and hence of divine evidence, in human lives. Neither such a God nor such *agapē* is a subjective human experience.

According to various New Testament writers, God ultimately testifies to Godself, including God's reality and moral character, via the Spirit of the risen Christ, God's own perfect image. We should not expect mere claims or mere subjective experiences to be self-attesting about objective reality. God, however, is an intentional causal agent who can be self-authenticating in being self-manifesting and self-witnessing regarding God's own reality and moral character. Accordingly, Paul attributes the following statement to God: 'I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me' (Rom. 10:20). Similarly, John's Gospel portrays Jesus as being self-manifesting: 'Those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them' (Jn. 14:21). This kind of self-authenticating via self-manifestation fits with the biblical theme of God's confirming God's own reality. The underlying rationale is that God inherently has a (self-sufficient) morally perfect character and cannot find anyone or anything else to serve the purpose of authentication for God's reality and moral character. Accordingly, Isaiah attributes the following announcement to God: 'I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn' (Isa. 45:22–3; see also Gen. 22:16–17; Heb. 6:13–14).

The reality of divine self-authentication via God's Spirit has important consequences for human knowledge of God. James S. Stewart calls this reality *the divine self-verification of Christ in conscience*. He identifies a key feature of this form of divine self-authentication, as follows: 'This is a very wonderful thing which happens: you begin exploring the fact of Christ, perhaps merely intellectually and theologically—and before you know where you are, the fact is exploring *you*, spiritually and morally.... You set out to see what you can find in Christ, and sooner or later God in Christ finds you. That is the self-verification of Jesus' (1940: 87–8; cf. Moser 2013: Ch. 3). More specifically, we may think of this phenomenon as God's self-authentication of God and Christ via the inner witness of the Spirit of God (see Mackintosh 1912, 317–20). Inquirers about God can benefit from examining this kind of religious experience, which does not reduce to a philosophical argument about the existence of God. In fact, philosophical arguments about God's existence can divert attention from this distinctive kind of religious experience.

We have noted that, in Paul's theological epistemology, God self-manifests the divine character of *agapē* in the experience of cooperative humans, pouring out God's enemy-love in their hearts, through the Spirit (Rom. 5:5). Mere humans and counterfeit gods, including imaginary gods, lack the needed power and moral character to self-manifest in this manner. Only a God of perfect love can self-manifest in this way because only such a God has the needed power and moral character. Given that God is *sui generis* in this regard, we should expect God to be self-manifesting, self-witnessing, and self-authenticating. Only God has the self-sufficient *agapē* character of enemy-love needed for the task; no other agent, then, is worthy of worship or divinely self-manifesting. God's self-authentication via self-manifestation challenges humans to cooperate with enemy-love and forgiveness, in opposition to destructive selfishness and pride. In this perspective of divine self-authentication, mere humans do not convince people regarding God. *God* alone can do this, and humans may contribute by being in cooperation with God in Christ, thereby manifesting the power of God's own *agapē*.

As self-authenticating, God wants people to know God directly, in a cooperative acquaintance relationship of direct interpersonal knowledge, without the distraction of philosophical arguments. Accordingly, God wants the self-commitment of human agents to be directed to *God*, not ultimately to an inference or a conclusion of an argument. As a result, a recurring theme among biblical writers is that God alone is our foundation, rock, and anchor, and this includes our cognitive foundation regarding God's reality (see, for instance, Ps. 18:2, 31, 28:1, 31:3; Isa. 44:8; cf. 1 Cor. 2:9–13). This theme implies that God wants to be one's sole evidential foundation for believing in God and for believing that God exists, and hence no argument is to assume this role. The evidential foundation, more precisely, is *God in God's self-manifesting interventions through the Spirit* in one's life, including in one's conscience. This foundation upholds God's vital existential significance for human inquirers, and contrasts with any abstract argument for God's existence. Humans can put themselves in a position to apprehend the witness from divine self-manifestations by becoming willingly open to receive and to cooperate with redemptive self-sacrifice, the trademark of God's perfect moral character of *agapē*.

Inquirers about God often neglect the importance of a *nondiscursive* manifestational witness in human experience to God's reality. This neglect may result from their overemphasizing the role of discursive, intellectual reasons for beliefs regarding God. Perhaps this neglect comes from a dubious kind of epistemic belief-coherentism that lacks the needed resources of an experience-oriented foundationalism. It may also stem from a confusion of the conditions for one's having or manifesting evidence and the conditions for one's giving an argument. It is a mistake, however, to confuse evidence and an argument. If all evidence is an argument, we face a devastating epistemic regress problem (see Moser 1989 for details).

Evidence is *discursive* if and only if it uses assertive language to express a state of affairs, or a situation. The New Testament category of 'witness' (*marturia*), however, is more inclusive than that of discursive evidence. A witness to God's reality and redemption can include discursive evidence, but it need not do so. For instance, a *nondiscursive* mode of human existing or relating can be a witness to God's redemptive character in virtue of manifesting distinctive features of God's character, such as divine *agapē*, without making an assertion. The inner witness of the Spirit of God can manifest in the same way. This lesson bears directly on an aim to manifest one's reasons for acknowledging God, including an aim to manifest a reason for the hope in God within one (1 Pet. 3:15). The desired manifestation and witness need not be discursive. Even when a witness to God's reality includes a discursive component, that component need not be an argument. It could be a descriptive testimony to what God has done in one's life.

The key point is that foundational reasons or evidence need not be discursive, but can be nonpropositional character traits supplied by God's self-manifesting Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and so on (Gal. 5:22–3). In the same vein, John's Gospel portrays Jesus as stating that his disciples will be *known* by their *agapē* for others (Jn. 13:35). The Jesus of the Gospels did not mention or use any philosophical arguments in this connection, or in any other connection, with regard to God's reality and intervention. The same is true of his followers represented in the New Testament, and this fact does not entail a defect in their actual reasons or evidence. Many inquirers rightly wonder whether an argument has support from a corresponding nondiscursive witness, which can have power and cogency irreducible to statements and arguments. (On a nondiscursive witness in *personifying evidence* of God, see Moser 2010, Ch. 4.)

Cases of a nondiscursive witness to God need not be accompanied by a judgement that something is the case regarding God. A dual witness, however, will include both a nondiscursive and a discursive witness, with the discursive witness elucidating the nondiscursive manifestation. The inner witness of the Spirit, accordingly, need not come with a propositional affirmation that elucidates the Spirit's nondiscursive witness. The Spirit's presentation of God's *agapē* to a person can be free of any discursive characterization. It follows that the witness of the Spirit need not be limited to the propositional content of the Old and New Testaments. The witness of the Spirit arguably will not conflict with the person and the message of Christ, but it would be unduly restrictive to limit the Spirit's witness to the propositional content of the biblical writings. Paul had in mind the Spirit's nondiscursive witness when he remarked: 'My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God' (1 Cor. 2:4–5). This power includes at least the self-manifested *agapē* of God, courtesy of the Spirit's inner witness.

The Spirit's inner witness of divine *agapē* can bridge the historical chasm between the first-century cross of Christ and contemporary people. It can do this by relaying not the historical, first-century event of the cross itself (nothing could do that), but the divine *agapē* that motivated the cross and the crucified Christ. This kind of witness yields an alternative to the kind of historicism that limits evidence of God's redemptive work to past history. It offers evidence regarding the historic Christ that is not itself evidence only from the past. The witness of the Spirit, we might say, transcends the limitations of historical events, and thereby provides a distinctive kind of evidence of God's reality and character. In this respect, not all evidence regarding God is limited to past events. History is important as evidence, but it does not exhaust the evidence given by the witness of the Spirit (see Mackintosh 1912: 306–20).

The fact that God is self-authenticating via self-manifestation allows for one's using abductive, or explanatory, considerations to present evidence for God. *Presenting* evidence, however, goes beyond *having* evidence, and the two should not be confused. One might argue that the power of self-sacrificial love in a disciple of Jesus is explained best, at least so far as our available evidence indicates, by the good news that God's Spirit has genuinely intervened with *agapē* in the disciple's life. This power yields a salient kind of evidence for the reality and the moral character of God, at least for the recipient of this power. One's recognition of such divine power and evidence depends on one's willingness to acknowledge these as not of our own, human making. Arguably, they are received as a gift from God or not at all.

As suggested, the human cooperative reception of God's Spirit is no merely subjective matter, because it yields one's becoming loving and forgiving (to some discernible degree) as God is loving and forgiving. It yields salient fruit of God's Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–3). These are not merely subjective phenomena. On the contrary, they are discernible by anyone attentive to them and open to the redemptive power of God. Even so, people are free to resist the relevant presentation of evidence, and they can do so consistently if they maintain certain standards for evidence and belief. In the latter case, one's presentation of evidence for God on the basis of explanatory considerations will fail to produce a non-question-begging argument for the people who resist. This does not challenge, however, the person who has the relevant evidence for God.

The writer of 1 John advises people to 'test the spirits to see whether they are of God' rather than to believe every spirit (1 Jn. 4:1). Otherwise, people can be led away from truth and into serious error by false teachers. Jesus offers similar advice: 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.... Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit' (Mt. 7:15–17). We can know the reality of the presence of God's Spirit by means of the fruits yielded by the Spirit. God's Spirit makes one loving (to some discernible degree) as God is loving. This is the primary fruit of the Spirit, and it is identifiable and testable in a person's life. The presence of God's Spirit thus comes with salient evidence observable by any suitably receptive person.

The salience of the evidence for God's Spirit does not exclude its elusiveness or even its hiddenness at times for some people. Paul remarks: 'Those who are unspiritual do not receive the [things] of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are discerned spiritually' (1 Cor. 2:14; cf. Jn. 14:22–4). The underlying idea is that God can hide the witness of the Spirit from people who are unwilling to engage it with due seriousness and sincerity. Their unwillingness may be understood as a refusal to face a Gethsemane crisis with the obedient attitude of Jesus towards God. The divine hiding would save some people from self-harming by treating as trivial something that is vital for them. In this respect, at least, the witness of God's Spirit is elusive and even hidden at times (see Moser 2008). If the overall evidence for God is similarly elusive, people should reconsider some of the main assumptions of traditional natural theology.

## Conclusion

According to the New Testament, the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ and thus is seen most clearly in his life, death, and resurrection. The witness of this Spirit relays God's redemptive love and the message thereof to cooperative people. Humans will apprehend this Spirit's reality only if they are willing, in the words of Jesus, to have 'eyes to see and ears to hear' what God intends for humans. The intended recipients of the witness must open themselves to be attuned to the moral character of God, including divine *agapē*. Even in the case of humans knowing God, God seeks to move their wills towards obedience to God's perfect will, just as Jesus obeyed in Gethsemane. Being perfectly loving, God seeks to have humans learn to love and to obey as Jesus loves and obeys. Accordingly, the witness of God's Spirit aims for the reconciliation of humans to God. The final issue is just this: will we cooperatively receive the challenging witness on offer? In any case, the role for sincere human decision in response is now clear and vital.

### Acknowledgement

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## CHAPTER 8

# TRADITION

MARK WYNN

## INTRODUCTION

THE importance of 'tradition' as an epistemic category is relative to the importance of 'revelation' as an epistemic category: those truths that are revealed in some founding event or text are to be communicated to others or 'handed on' (the cognate Latin verb is 'tradere'). Accordingly, a reliable 'tradition' is required for the safe transmission of the data of revelation. It might be inferred that the epistemically interesting category is really, therefore, revelation—and that the role of tradition is simply to conserve what has already been established in revelation.

In this chapter, I shall set out a rather different, and more expansive, understanding of the epistemic significance of tradition. Since the object of this volume is to explore the character of epistemic norms and practices as they are defined in specifically theological contexts, I am going to proceed by examining some examples, drawn from the history of theology, of 'tradition' at work. But first I begin by considering a little further the idea that the role of tradition is simply to recapitulate what has been communicated in revelation. For reasons of space, I am going to confine myself to an examination of Christian traditions, but much of what I say in this regard could be extended to the other monotheisms. Since the focus of this chapter is 'tradition', I am not going to develop a fuller account of the nature of revelation, by considering whether it is, for example, constituted by a text or a person. The standard approaches will all be consistent with what I say here (see Abraham 2006).

## TRADITION AND THE CONSERVATION OF REVEALED TRUTH

In this section, I am going to consider what it would take to conserve the content of a revelation, noting the role of judgement in this process. Even if a theologian's goal is simply to 'hand on' a body of (purportedly) revealed truths, it will not be sufficient to reiterate verbatim what has been said by earlier generations of believers. Insofar as it is communicated verbally, a revealed truth will be cast in terms that presuppose the world view—including, for example, the cosmology and anthropology—which prevailed at the time of the founding events of the tradition. This is not simply a contingent truth concerning the history of the various monotheisms, but reflects a fundamental constraint on the possibility of revelation: if the verbal formulation of a revealed truth were not to be cast, in significant measure, in terms of the world view of the time, then it is doubtful whether it would be intelligible to its first hearers, and doubtful therefore whether it would constitute a 'revelation' of any kind, let alone one that could be 'handed on'. Since world views change over time, theologians will need to distinguish, therefore, between those features of the original revelation which are enduringly valid and those which reflect the operation of culturally local and now antiquated assumptions about the nature of the cosmos or the human person (Swinburne 2007). Hence the handing on of a tradition will call for more than simply the verbatim repetition of earlier formulations of the tradition.

Some recent disputes in theology can be understood very readily in these terms. For example, is the idea of a historical fall intrinsic to the Christian story considered as revelatory, or is it to be attributed simply to the world view that prevailed at the time when the biblical text was composed? Or again, are scriptural passages which appear to speak against homosexual practices directed simply at certain customs which obtained in the ancient world, or do they extend to all such practices, including customs that may not have been much in evidence in the ancient world—such as unions based on ideals of enduring commitment and fidelity? As these two examples indicate, disputes of these kinds may not be resolvable simply by appeal to the 'empirical facts'. A person could subscribe to evolutionary theory, for example, while still retaining the idea of a historical fall (Van Inwagen 2006).

We might distinguish three cases (these cases are not logically exhaustive, but they pick out some of the more interesting possibilities). First, there is the case where an idea embedded in a scriptural text or some other purportedly revealed source appears to contradict the findings of contemporary science. Second, there is the case where a revealed source appears to make, or to presuppose, a claim about the structure or history of the physical world, but one that is not directly accessible to scientific enquiry—at least not as yet, and perhaps not even in principle. Finally, there is the case where a revealed source appears to affirm some normative, for instance moral, claim—and therefore a claim whose truth or falsity could not be established definitively even within an utterly comprehensive physics. As an example of the first case, we might cite the belief that the heavens are located, quite literally, above the earth. As an example of the second, we might take the claim that there was a historical fall (where this claim is developed in such a way as to ensure its consistency with evolutionary theory). And as an example of the third case, we could cite the belief that homosexual practices are intrinsically disordered.

As the dispute over the status of 'creationism' attests, some Christians wish to uphold beliefs that appear to be incompatible with (seemingly) well-grounded scientific theories. But others are inclined to suppose that there cannot be any fundamental conflict between the findings of 'natural reason' and what is disclosed in revelation. And it is not difficult to think of a theological rationale for this stance: one might appeal, for instance, to the thought that the data of revelation and the powers of reasoning that are deployed in scientific investigation must both derive, ultimately, from the one God, who is no deceiver. Hence these two sources cannot come into fundamental conflict (John Paul II 1998).

Moving to the second category of belief, it might be reasoned that if a theologian would wish to withdraw a belief were it to come into conflict with the apparent findings of scientific enquiry, then the epistemic status of the belief cannot be very secure, even if there is as yet no conflict. And in that case, it might be said, why suppose that the belief is to be upheld even now: surely the mere in-principle possibility of such a clash, and the knowledge that the belief would be retracted under those circumstances, should be enough to alert the theologian to the impropriety of taking 'revelation' as authoritative in these matters? But in turn it might be said that some of the beliefs that fall within this second category will be integral to the vision of life, or of salvation, that is articulated in the revelation. And the theologian must suppose that the revelation is competent to pronounce upon these matters—as a condition of supposing that it can constitute a revelation at all. For example, it might be thought that certain anthropological claims, concerning perhaps human freedom, or the basic proclivities of human beings, are presupposed in the vision of life that is set down in the various monotheistic revelations.

We might suppose that there can also be a clash between 'modern' thought and the teachings of revealed texts where the third category of belief is concerned. For instance, it might be said that it was not only ancient cultures' understanding of the physical world that was relatively undeveloped, but also their moral understanding. For example, it was commonly thought in ancient societies that slavery was morally unexceptionable. So perhaps scriptural traditions, insofar as they are expressed in terms of the presuppositions of their time, need to be purged not only of false beliefs about the nature of the physical world, but also of false moral beliefs?

Therefore it cannot be assumed that the relation between 'tradition' and 'revelation', from the vantage point of theological enquiry, is just one of 're-capitulation'. This is because disciplined judgement is required as theologians of later times try to determine which ideas are to be considered as 'revealed' and which are to be considered as cultural presuppositions, which reflect simply the conception of the natural world, and the values, that prevailed at some earlier time.

## Drawing the Boundary between 'Revelation' and 'Culture'

In general terms, two assumptions will be important in determining how a tradition is to draw this boundary between the content of revelation and the contingent form of the revelation, so far as that reflects local cosmological or other beliefs. On one side, the theologian will need to form a view about how revelation is constituted. To take a limiting case, if revelation is thought to be dictated verbatim by God, so that the scribe who records the revelation is conceived as no more than a passive instrument, none of whose ideas or imaginings enter into the verbal formulation of the revelation, and if there is consensus on what this dictated text means, then it will be reasonable to suppose that the role of 'tradition' is one of simple reiteration, and reasonable to suppose that any clash between the apparent content of the revealed text and contemporary understanding (even contemporary understanding of the physical world) is to be resolved in favour of the revealed text. However, disagreements between the apparent content of the revealed text and, for example, contemporary science will put pressure on this model of revelation, since there are reasons for supposing, once again, that science involves the exercise of epistemic capacities that are themselves God-given and reasons for supposing that God is no deceiver.

There will also be a limiting case at the other end of this spectrum, where the verbal form of revelation is taken to be largely mediated by the cultural assumptions of the one to whom the revelation is communicated. I say 'largely' rather than 'entirely' because if we say 'entirely', then arguably we are no longer thinking of 'revelation' as traditionally conceived, but of the normal operation of human thought, where that thought is in principle entirely explicable in social-psychological terms. Although this is too large a topic to address here, one might, however, allow for the possibility of a 'revelation' that *is* so explicable, but where the divine Revealer is supposed to have set up the relevant psycho-social laws (and the physical laws that are presupposed in their operation) so as to produce this revelation. On this account too, there will be a presumption that in terms of its verbal formulation, much of the revelation will reflect culturally local and now antiquated assumptions about the nature of the world. For if the thought of the individual to whom the revelation is communicated is ordered according to the normal operation of psycho-social laws, then that thought will, presumably, be saturated with the assumptions of the world view of the time.

When deciding how to draw the boundary between 'revelation' and 'culture', the theologian will also need to take a view about whether God's revealing activity is to some extent ongoing, insofar as certain individuals, or some kinds of experience, can lay claim to a special insight into the content of the original deposit of revelation. In the Roman Catholic tradition, famously, the papacy has been assigned precisely this role. Given the difficulty of constructing any kind of algorithm for determining where the boundary between culturally local, and now antiquated, understanding and an enduringly valid datum of revelation is to be drawn, it might be argued that there is a need for an individual, or group, who, by virtue of their tenure of some office, can issue case-specific rulings on the claim of particular moral or other teachings to belong to the deposit of revelation (Newman 1878: Pt I, Ch. II). To take this view is not to suppose that the original revelation is simply redundant: the authority of this individual does not extend to the capacity to propose radically new teachings, which diverge from or even contradict the original deposit. Instead, their role is to decide on the epistemic status of certain traditional teachings (as when the boundary between 'culture' and 'revelation' is at issue), and in cases where a teaching's sense is contested, to determine how it is to be interpreted. Moreover, if the claim to such authority is to have any plausibility, then this individual or group will presumably need to stand in an appropriate relation of historical continuity with those to whom the revelation was originally communicated (Swinburne 2007). So in this way too, the founding events of the revelation will exercise an enduring role in defining its content.

As is well known, the Vatican has not been slow to assert its claim to this kind of authority in relation to various contemporary debates, such as those concerning homosexual practice. Matters are complicated here by the willingness of the Vatican to pronounce in addition upon questions that are not addressed—not even, it would seem, indirectly—in the Christian scriptures or in Christ's ministry, as for example the question of abortion. Here it is claimed that an individual occupying the relevant ecclesial role has not only the authority to determine the sense and epistemic status of various ideas embedded in the scriptures, but also the authority to introduce new teachings, not simply on his own account, but insofar as these teachings are in keeping with the 'natural law'. On this view, the relevant office holder has privileged access both to the 'revealed' will of God and also to that will as it is inscribed in the 'natural' law (see e.g. John Paul II 1995).

Rather than privileging a particular individual or office holder in this way, another way of dealing with the difficulty of providing a rule for determining the boundary between 'revealed truth' and 'cultural accretion' is by supposing that the individual believer, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, can themselves adjudicate such matters. Broadly speaking, this is the response favoured by Protestant Christian traditions. Both accounts pose difficulties. Against the model of centralized judgement, it may be objected that those who have exercised such judgement have all too often been swayed by what have proved to be, retrospectively, culturally local convictions. And against the model which seeks to devolve judgement to the individual believer, it may be objected that the persistence of endemic disagreement about how revelation is to be interpreted (Stout 1987) suggests that the divine will in these matters is disclosed at best only to some sincere inquirers—and in that case, we are left with a question about how to determine which individuals are genuinely in receipt of a disclosure of this will. The model therefore just substitutes, the objector will urge, one kind of uncertainty (how is revelation to be interpreted?) with another kind of uncertainty that is no more tractable (how are we to determine which individuals are in receipt of the necessary guidance from the Holy Spirit, which will allow them to speak with authority on these matters?). These two approaches are not so different insofar as the judgement of the Pope is supposed to reflect an already established consensus among the faithful, rather than simply to constitute such a consensus (*Catechism* 2003: Pt 1, Section 1, Ch. 2, Art. 2).

There are analogues for these cases in the secular domain. In secular fields of enquiry as in theological, the views of some individuals will command special authority. And this is not only for broadly psychological reasons (because of an individual's charisma, for instance), but also because there is good reason to think that the views of some individuals should be assigned more epistemic weight, as for example when a person has a record of right judgement in relation to a given subject matter (McMyler 2011; Zagzebski 2012). Even in philosophical discussion, which is famously unconcerned with 'authority', it should be deemed a merit in a view that it has the support of a well-known figure in the history of the discipline. Why? Not simply for reasons of authority, but because if an individual has a record of right or at least insightful judgement in relation to other philosophical questions, then we may suppose, by induction, that there is at least a presumption that they will have displayed some insight in a further case, even if we cannot as yet see how that might be. The views of such individuals—who are thought to have a record of right or perceptive judgement—together with the body of commentary that has accumulated around those views, will constitute the 'tradition' for any given field of enquiry. Such traditions are, it seems reasonable to suppose, especially important in humanities disciplines, rather than the 'hard' sciences, where there is less of a need for context-relative, case-specific judgement, since the relevant considerations can be set out formally and in quantitative terms (Mitchell 1973).

'Tradition' as it relates to theology operates somewhat like this. In theology too, it counts in favour of a view if it has, apparently, the backing of the 'individual' who has spoken in revelation. And in theology too, this will be a defeasible consideration. Only here, if the presumption in favour of the view is overturned, this can only be because we suppose that the view was not after all given in 'revelation', but was a product of other sources such as local cultural conventions. By contrast, we can suppose that a certain view was indeed taught by, say, Kant, and is mistaken even so. So 'tradition' as it operates in theology is distinctive insofar as the relevant sources, whose teaching tradition seeks to preserve, are taken to be infallible.

As we have seen, tradition as it applies in theological contexts can also involve the idea of ongoing divine 'revelation' or guidance—whether in the form of an individual who can speak with authority on interpretive and other questions because they occupy the relevant office, or in the form of the inward guidance granted to certain Spirit-inspired individuals. Once again, we can find analogues for these cases in secular contexts. If someone holds a position at a university of repute, then their views on certain interpretive questions, relevant to their own field of expertise, will to that extent carry more weight. Similarly, if an individual is known to have been taught by a scholar of distinction, then there may be a presumption that this individual's 'intuitions' about how that scholar is to be read will carry a certain weight. But again, these cases differ from the theological case, insofar as they allow us to say, for example, that a given individual really does occupy the relevant office and yet is mistaken. By contrast, within a Roman Catholic context, for example, if one wishes to dispute the views of the individual who is apparently the Pope, on some matter concerning which the Pope has jurisdiction, then one must dispute whether this individual is indeed the Pope.

So far I have been talking fairly generically about the epistemology of tradition as it applies in theological contexts. I have suggested that 'tradition' cannot be a matter of simply 'handing on' verbatim certain ideas, because there is a requirement for the exercise of disciplined, case-specific judgement about whether the verbal formulation of a given teaching belongs properly to the deposit of revelation, or is instead the product, in some measure at least, of local cultural circumstance. Each generation must draw this distinction anew as our understanding in other fields develops. I have suggested that, in general terms, we can envisage three kinds of disagreement between the apparent content of revelation and our emerging understanding of the world. For many theologians, an apparent datum of revelation will have to be given up if it comes into conflict with contemporary science; but there appears to be less agreement on how to proceed when an apparent datum of revelation diverges from an emerging consensus on some normative question. Finally, there is also the case where an apparent datum of revelation concerns the nature of the physical world, but in some respect that is beyond the reach of scientific enquiry, at least for now. Here there is no conflict, but a question about whether revelation should be taken to extend to this kind of subject matter, rather than a purely 'salvific' subject matter, concerning the nature and purposes of God, and an associated vision of the kind of life that is fitting for human beings. As we have seen, such a vision of life is likely to require, if it is to be coherent, certain basic claims about the nature of human agency, and the context in which human choices are made. So the theologian must assign 'revelation' a measure of authority on these questions, on pain of supposing that it has nothing to teach even on strictly 'salvific' matters.

Having reviewed these generic issues, it will be helpful next to consider some examples of the role that 'tradition' has played in theological enquiry. In this way, we may hope to reach a clearer view of some of the distinguishing features of 'tradition' as it has operated in theological contexts. I shall take as my focus two figures of indisputable authority in Christian tradition, and consider how each embodies a certain conception of what it is for Christian teaching to be 'handed on'.

## Anselm on Tradition: The Model of 'Faith Seeking Understanding'

I have been suggesting that 'tradition' as it operates in theology has to reckon with the question of how to relate 'revelation' to newly emerging understandings of the world. But even if there were no such change, there would still be a question about how the data of revelation might be ordered more effectively, and how we might arrive at a deepened understanding of what follows from the data of revelation. The work of Saint Anselm (1033–109) is famously an exercise in 'faith seeking understanding'. Anselm notes that it was his intention to entitle the *Monologion* 'An Example of Meditation on the Meaning of Faith' and the *Proslogion* 'Faith in Quest of Understanding' (1998: 83), and these titles faithfully reflect the tenor of his approach to theological questions. On this view, we are to begin from 'faith', or a particular construal of the content of 'revelation', and work out from there to understand everything else. Accordingly, we might see the role of tradition as it is evident in Anselm's work not as a matter of adjusting our understanding of revelation to fit newly emerging and apparently competing understandings of the world or of human nature, but as a meditation upon the data of revelation themselves, so that their meaning and implications can be better understood.

To take just one example, for Anselm, it was a datum of revelation that God is wise and living and powerful. But by reflecting upon these truths, he takes himself to have discovered a further divine property, or meta-property, that is not itself disclosed in revelation, but can reasonably be postulated as the ground (in a logical rather than causal sense) of those divine properties that are disclosed directly in revelation. Hence, Anselm comments that 'the supreme nature necessarily is any P that is better without qualification than not-P' (Anselm 1998: 28). The phrase 'without qualification' here indicates 'pure perfections', that is, qualities of which we can say in every case, that it is better to be P than not P. To adapt one of his examples of a quality of which this cannot be said, being gold is a perfection in a coin, but not in a human being (27). So Anselm's proposal is that we should ascribe to God the meta-property of having all—and only—those properties that are 'pure perfections'. Granted this understanding of the 'supreme nature', it will follow directly that God has all those qualities that are attributed to God in the scriptures. On this understanding: 'The necessary conclusion is then that the supreme essence is alive, wise, all-powerful, true, just, happy, eternal …'. But of course, having identified this meta-property (the property of having every property which counts as a pure perfection), Anselm is also, in principle, in a position to ascribe to God further first-order properties that we are committed to ascribing to God, insofar as they are pure perfections, but are not themselves mentioned in scripture. Hence, we should attribute to God 'whatever is likewise better without qualification than not-whatever' (28), where the 'whatever' here can, in principle, range over divine properties in addition to those that are picked out in scripture.

Here a theologian is elaborating upon the data of revelation in two respects: first, by identifying the logical structure of various claims made in revelation. (In this case, this is a matter of seeing that the various properties ascribed to God in scripture are all implied in God's possession of a further, meta-property, where this property is not itself ascribed to God, directly, in scripture.) And second, Anselm is able to expand on the data supplied by scripture by seeing how a person's acceptance of certain scriptural claims will commit them to further claims that are not themselves made in scripture. To take the same example, once we recognize that scripture represents God as all-wise, and so on, then we can see that scripture is implicitly committed to the claim that God has every pure perfection; and in turn, therefore, we can see that scripture is committed to ascribing to God some first-order perfections which are not named in scripture. (This commitment follows, I take it, from the thought that this meta-property provides a simple, powerful explanation of why it should be that God has these other properties.) So as it is enacted in Anselm's thought, tradition plays the dual role of drawing out the interconnectedness of the data of revelation, and showing how we might extrapolate from the data to address further matters that are not directly addressed in the scriptural text. We might say then that, as it is represented here, tradition has relative to 'revelation' an ordering and also an extrapolative or projective role, and not simply a recapitulative role. As Anselm's example indicates, these roles are, potentially, connected: it may be by virtue of arriving at a new ordering of the data of revelation that we can understand more clearly their implications.

## Thomas Aquinas: Christian Tradition and Secular Learning

In the work of Thomas Aquinas, 'tradition' has to do not so much with the elaboration of the data of revelation considered in themselves (as in Anselm), but with the question of how Christian 'revelation' is to be articulated in a radically new, and potentially (from a theological point of view) subversive, intellectual context. With the emergence in translation of various works of Aristotle in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Christian world view found itself with an apparent rival, as all of the central topics of Christian theology (God, the nature of the moral life, the ends of the person, and so on) could also be addressed in terms of Aristotle's metaphysics, physics, philosophy of mind, and ethics. In this respect, Thomas's intellectual context is rather reminiscent of our own: in our time, the apparently comprehensive world view that promises to address all the central themes of Christian theology is natural science, broadly conceived so as to include, for example, evolutionary psychology. Given this parallel, a consideration of how 'tradition' functions in the work of Thomas Aquinas is not merely of antiquarian interest. I am going to take two examples of how Aquinas engages with the emerging Aristotelian account of the nature of the human person and of fundamental reality. Perhaps the most striking feature of Aquinas's articulation of the basic claims of Christian theology in these circumstances is his willingness to think through those claims using the conceptual framework of the Aristotelian tradition. In the First of the Five Ways, in *Summa Theologiae* (I q.2 a.3), for example, he gives a proof for the existence of God which tracks the proof that Aristotle gives in the *Metaphysics* (Aristotle 1998: Bk Lamda): for Aquinas as for Aristotle, God is to be understood as the one who changes without undergoing change, or as the unmoved mover. From the text of the First Way, the reader would naturally assume that by 'potentiality' Aquinas means exactly what Aristotle had meant by *dunamnis.* But the highly systematic character of the *Summa* means that here as elsewhere, Aquinas's meaning has to be read in the light of what he says at other points in his text. In the following question, Aquinas considers whether God can be thought to be 'composed of essence and existence' (*ST* I q.3 a.4).[1] And here, in the second of the arguments that he develops in the body of the response, he writes that:

> existence is that which makes every form or nature actual; for goodness and humanity are spoken of as actual, only because they are spoken of as existing. Therefore existence must be compared to essence, if the latter is a distinct reality, as actuality to potentiality. Therefore, since in God there is no potentiality, as shown above (Article [1]), it follows that in Him essence does not differ from existence. Therefore His essence is His existence.

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[1] This and subsequent references to the *Summa Theologiae* here are to this translation: Aquinas, Thomas (1947). *Summa Theologiae*, Benziger Bros. edn., trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Available at http://dhspriory.org/thomas/summa/index.html.

Aquinas's argument proceeds by taking the notion of potentiality and applying it in a new context: here the existence of finite things is said to involve the actualization of their natures' potential to exist; and this claim in turn is taken to involve the thought that in finite things there is a distinction between nature or essence and existence. Since in God there can be no potentiality, it follows that God's existence cannot be represented as the actualization of the divine nature's potentiality to exist; and in turn it follows that God's nature cannot be distinct from God's existence, and that God's essence is therefore simply to be.

Whatever we make of this case, it is clear that the notion of potentiality is here being stretched, as it is employed in a new context, to articulate a distinctively Christian claim, one that Aristotle did not affirm or even entertain: namely, the claim that God is the creator *ex nihilo*, the one who is the source not only of change in things, but of their being. Given the role that this argument gives to the idea that there is no potentiality in God, it is clear that we need to go back to the First Way, and read Aquinas's claim, as developed there, that there is no potentiality in God in the way that is required if that claim is to sustain the argument of Question 3, Article 4. In other words, we need to read the claim that there is no potentiality in God, as that claim is developed in Question 2, to include the thought that the existence of God does not involve the actualization of a potentiality to be.

Aquinas's understanding of potentiality is further elaborated when he turns to consider the Trinitarian nature of God in *Summa Theologiae* (I q. 27). One might have supposed that the concept of potentiality that is deployed in *Summa Theologiae* (I q.3 a.4) would have the implication that the Son's (and in turn the Spirit's) existence involves the actualization of a potentiality—after all, the Son is said in Christian teaching to 'proceed' from the Father. But it is clear that Aquinas wishes to deny that there is any potentiality in the Son. From the discussion of Question 27, it is evident that although the Son proceeds from the Father, the Son remains different from creatures, since this procession is necessary. And accordingly, it is the Son's nature to exist, just as it is the Father's nature to exist. Hence we can say that there is no 'potentiality' in God, not even in God the Son, insofar as potentiality implies not simply derivation, but contingent existence.

In this discussion, as he moves from Question 2 to Question 3 and then on to 27, we find Aquinas gradually elaborating on the notion of potentiality that he has inherited from Aristotle. In Question 2, considered in isolation from the remainder of his text, the notion of potentiality seems to be functioning exactly as it does in Aristotle, namely to explain the necessity for change to be explained by reference to an unmoved mover. But the later questions show that Aquinas wants to use this same notion to address questions that were of no concern to Aristotle—those of God's status as the creator, and as a Trinity. What does this procedure tell us about Aquinas's understanding of the role of 'tradition'?

Before he gets to put the concept of potentiality to work, Aquinas already believes that God is the ultimate source of change, and that God is the creator and a Trinity. But he is articulating these familiar theological claims in terms of a conceptual vocabulary that will allow them to be brought into relation with the best secular learning of the day.

Here Aquinas's procedure suggests two things about tradition: first, that it is the responsibility of the theologian to make the claims of the Christian tradition intelligible, so far as possible, to their contemporaries, and therefore to find ways of articulating those claims in terms of the concepts that are anyway current in the intellectual culture of the day. There is an element of intellectual humility and of charity in this procedure: there is humility in that the concepts of others are given a certain precedence as the theologian accommodates himself or herself to the habits of thought of others, and there is charity in that this exercise is motivated by a concern for the well-being of others, which is thought to depend upon their coming to share certain insights that are contained within the Christian revelation. In this context, humility and charity are naturally understood as specifically Christian epistemic virtues, which govern the handing on of the data of revelation to later generations.

Secondly, Aquinas's procedure reflects a certain confidence in the powers of reason, and a certain conception of the relation between 'grace' and 'nature'. If the best secular learning finds that the concept of potentiality is integral to a developed appreciation of the nature of things, then to that extent there is reason to suppose that potentiality is a concept that will also be useful for theology, since there is a presumption that secular reason is capable of tracking the nature of things. Also implied in this procedure is the thought that 'revealed' insights are not simply discontinuous with the insights that are available on the basis of the exercise of 'natural' reason, but involve instead a kind of deepening or extension of those insights. This ideal of deepening is enacted in Aquinas's handling of the notion of potentiality: his notion is not straightforwardly the same as Aristotle's, because he has elaborated upon Aristotle's concept, by applying it to, and adapting it to fit, new contexts of enquiry. Aquinas's notion is, we could say, analogically related to Aristotle's. And this reflects a wider truth that 'revelation' does not simply contradict what can be known by 'natural reason', or stand in some self-contained epistemic sphere that is entirely discontinuous from human understanding as it operates in other domains. Instead, revelation analogically extends what we can otherwise know. Here we see how wider epistemic assumptions, concerning the status of secular reason, can shape the form that is taken by tradition, as a body of theological ideas is articulated in a new intellectual context. However, not all theologians have subscribed to this view of the relation between the findings of natural reason and of revelation: some have been more content with a picture of discontinuity, or even contradiction. But for those who share Aquinas's perspective, it will make sense to suppose that when reflecting upon the data of revelation, we can put to ready use those concepts that have emerged from our secular enquiries.

In sum, on this Thomistic approach, when theology encounters some newly emergent, secular conception of the nature of things, its response ought not to be one of simply reiterating familiar truths in terms of the concepts that are embedded in theological tradition. The response ought, rather, to take the form of picking up the concepts that are current in the newly established secular understanding and trying so far as possible to articulate the data of revelation in terms of these concepts, where this exercise will most likely involve some analogical reworking of those concepts. So in this way, tradition does not just defer to secular reason but puts it to use, because in borrowing various concepts from secular thought it also stretches them, as they are applied in new contexts.

## Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and the Moral Life

It would be easy to cite other examples of Aquinas's implementation of this sort of strategy as he brings Christian self-understanding into conceptual contact with the deliverances of the Aristotelian tradition. Let me mention just one, very briefly. In his account of the moral life, Aquinas adopts Aristotle's understanding of the moral virtues, insofar as he allows that virtues such as courage, justice, and temperance can be acquired by way of a process of habituation. On this point, he extends the theological tradition that he had inherited, since that tradition had been inclined to think of virtue in general as what God 'works in us without us' (*ST* I–II q.63 a.2; Inglis 1999). So here Aquinas's procedure is one of allowing secular learning to correct received theological opinion. His reasons for doing this are no doubt various, but his approach indicates again a certain confidence in secular reason, and also a willingness to defer to secular reason where the subject matter is human nature and the ends of life that are relative to human nature.

But, at the same time, Aquinas retains the view, long inscribed in Christian tradition, that the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity are 'infused' rather than acquired. He might have allowed the Aristotelian view and this further view to simply sit alongside one another. In this way, he could have divided the virtues into two categories—those that concern our flourishing in relation to creatures and those that are God-directed—and he could have assigned one mode of production to the first and another to the second (namely, habituation and infusion, respectively). But characteristically, Aquinas wants a closer relation between the 'natural' and 'theological' domains, and he finds a way of holding together these two spheres, so far as the virtues are concerned, by importing a conceptual innovation. Alongside the idea of acquired moral virtues and the idea of infused theological virtues, he introduces the idea that there are infused moral virtues. The role of the infused moral virtues is to relate us to the creaturely order (hence these virtues are 'moral' rather than 'theological') but to relate us to this order 'in relation to God' (hence the requirement that they should be 'infused') (*ST* I–II q.63 a.3). In other words, the role of the infused moral virtues is to ensure that our habits of thought and feeling in relation to creatures are fitting not only relative to those ends of life that are proportionate to our human nature, but also fitting relative to our ultimate goal (one we cannot know by natural reason alone) of sharing in the life of God.

For our purposes, what is of interest here is the conception of the role of 'tradition' that is implied in Aquinas's approach. First of all, in this instance anyway, Aquinas seems to suppose that the boundary between 'revelation' and 'culture' should be drawn in such a way as to recognize the authority of the secular sciences to pronounce upon human nature considered as such (that is, considered independently of whatever God-directed calling we may wish to associate with human life). Second, while the example of potentiality may have suggested that the role for innovation in the development of tradition is a matter of finding new ways of expressing familiar theological truths, this further example suggests that there is also a role for innovation insofar as significant theological discoveries can be made following the introduction of a new secular conceptual vocabulary. The idea that there are acquired moral virtues—here Aquinas follows Aristotle's conception of these matters—leads on naturally to the question of how these virtues are to be related to the theological virtues. That was not a question the tradition had put to itself since it did not have any use for the category of acquired moral virtue. But once that category had been introduced, there is a need to show how the acquired and theological virtues are to be related, assuming again that we do not wish to leave the realms of divine and creaturely truth as simply discontinuous spheres. So here the unfolding of tradition involves not simply the re-articulation of the data of revelation in a new idiom, but a genuinely new insight. These two features of Aquinas's approach turn out, then, to be related: allowing a measure of autonomy to the secular sciences means that tradition will need to evolve or innovate, as it encounters new questions concerning the 'hinge' between what we know by revelation and what we know of the world and of human nature from the secular sciences.

## Concluding Thoughts: Beyond Doctrine

Drawing on the examples of Anselm and Aquinas, we have been considering how the data of revelation might be elaborated in response to a variety of intellectual contexts. Tradition, understood as that act of elaboration, may involve the further ordering and in turn projection into new domains of the data of revelation; the re-articulation of the data through the analogical stretching of concepts drawn from the secular sciences; and the development of new insights into the 'hinge' between what we can know by way of secular reason and what we can know by way of revelation.

We have been concerned here with the handing on of 'doctrine' broadly conceived, including doctrines concerned with the divine nature and the human person. But however much we may understand about Christian metaphysical doctrines there will remain a question about what it is like, in experiential terms, to inhabit, in a properly Christian way, a world so conceived. And we might suppose, therefore, that a further role for tradition is to develop a phenomenology that is adequate to a given doctrinal scheme. To note just one example, we might read the writings of John of the Cross as an attempt to extend Christian understanding, not by seeking to elaborate upon the tradition in doctrinal terms, but by providing as it were a phenomenological specification of its import. Consider for example how John's account (1991) of the relationship between the 'active' and 'passive' phases of the 'dark night' of the soul can be read as a rendering in an experiential idiom of Aquinas's remarks concerning the relationship between the 'acquired' and 'infused' moral virtues, whether or not it was John's intention that his remarks should be so construed. It is worth recalling here that on Aquinas's account the infused virtues typically succeed and build upon the acquired (*ST* I–II q.51 a.4 ad 3). John's account represents a discovery of a phenomenology for the spiritual life that is congruent with Thomas's doctrinal scheme. If this is so, then this is genuinely a new turn in the tradition, because no amount of reflection on Aquinas's account of the relationship between the acquired and infused virtues, for example, would of itself point to the very particular track of spiritual and experiential development that John describes, although it is easy enough to map the general contours of John's account on to Thomas's metaphysics of divine and human agency (Wynn 2013: Ch. 6).

Accordingly, we should suppose that the handing on and elaboration of tradition has a phenomenological and not only a creedal dimension. We could speak, then, of a broadly 'Thomist' (doctrinally focused) as well as a broadly 'Carmelite' (experientially focused) approach to the handing on of a tradition. And no doubt we could distinguish other modes of transmission too. We might speak for example of a broadly 'Franciscan' way of communicating the import of a tradition, which depends, at least in significant measure, not on the elaboration of doctrinal claims, nor upon the refinement of a phenomenology appropriate to the Christian life, but rather upon the enacted example of authoritative individuals (Stump 2010).

It seems unlikely that armchair theorizing alone can establish whether a given tradition will be fruitful for life. To assess a tradition in these terms, it seems we will need, rather, to examine its development over time, and its record of interaction with other such traditions, as well as its capacity to evolve new forms of experience and practice (MacIntyre 1990). Hence we can affirm both that it can be hard, here and now, to rank traditions, while still allowing for the possibility that, over time, some will prove superior to others (Haldane 1994). But whatever we may wish to say on these matters, this much is evident: any developed account of the epistemology of theology will need to recognize the manifold ways in which theological thought and practice are located within traditions.

## Acknowledgement

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## CHAPTER 9

# ECCLESIAL PRACTICES

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## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we first provide an overview of the place of practice in the work of some of the most prominent recent epistemologists of religion. Second, we give an account of an ordinary practice (engineering) to flesh out a general conception of the importance of practice in training cognizers for skilled perception. Third, we connect the results of this inquiry with renewed theological and philosophical interest in the 'spiritual senses' tradition. The upshot of these reflections is the conclusion that an adequate account of social practices already anticipates the possibility that *ecclesial* practice might contribute to an epistemic transformation capable of realizing new (spiritual) perceptual capacities by the transformed.

## ECCLESIAL PRACTICES IN RECENT EPISTEMOLOGY OF RELIGION

In light of its prominence in the recent epistemology of religion, we focus in this section on the epistemological school known as Reformed epistemology. We begin with the dean of that movement, Alvin Plantinga. Though we do not draw on Plantinga to thematize practice, he does help us to recognize certain limits endemic to cognitive life. In particular, he argues for the implausibility of certain requirements that have been laid down in the epistemological tradition, particularly the internalist demand for antecedent justification of the truth-reliability of our cognitive faculties. William P. Alston, to whom we turn subsequently, makes a similar argument with regard to practices. Just as there is no conceivable alternative but to trust in the veritistic orientation of our cognitive faculties, so Alston argues there is nothing for it but to trust in the reliability of our belief-forming practices. These practices cannot be antecedently justified, but they are justified practically insofar as they do not fail us. After sketching Alston's 'doxastic practice approach to epistemology', we note some reservations that have been raised regarding his project. These reservations concern the reliance on mechanical metaphors in his treatment of religious belief-formation and the role of personal agency in his model of doxastic practices. Although we mostly withhold judgement about whether these reservations are well taken in Alston's case, we find that they aim our attention in helpful directions for understanding the epistemic significance of practices.

Plantinga's externalism and epistemological naturalism are apt places to start. He finds internalist requirements 'a bit on the demanding side, to put it mildly'. Speaking very roughly, the internalist requires that a knower be in possession of good reasons for taking her beliefs to be true in order for those beliefs to qualify as knowledge. Take, for instance, 'the suggestion that I know p only if I am able to give a good argument for the conclusion that my cognitive faculties are reliable, without relying on those faculties in giving the argument' (Plantinga 2010a: 173; see also Plantinga 2010b: 696). The problem with such a demand is that it lays down requirements which not even God almighty, omniscient though God is, could satisfy. Accordingly, Plantinga's treatment of epistemic merit pivots from an internalist demand for justification to an externalist account of 'warrant'. On his account of epistemic merit, the requisite conditions of knowledge include matters pertaining both to the formation of the knower's sensory and doxastic (belief-forming) experiences and to what the knower *does* in response to her experiences (i.e. form proper beliefs, make right inferences, etc.). To put this in terms of a metaphor employed by Plantinga, knowledge is a function of conditions both 'upstream' and 'downstream' from a knower's doxastic experience. When things function properly both upstream and downstream, then the resulting beliefs will possess the merit Plantinga calls 'warrant'. Warrant is the quality of a belief's being formed by cognitive faculties functioning properly in an environment for which they are well suited according to a design plan that is aimed at truth (Plantinga 1993: 46–7). One result of this account of epistemic merit is that it can follow a Quinean replacement of epistemic normativity with descriptive psychology because the latter already presupposes the kind of normativity relevant to externalist 'warrant' (see Quine 1969). This is a normative concept of 'ought' analogous to 'the use [of "ought"] in which we say, of a damaged knee, or a diseased pancreas, or a worn brake shoe, that it no longer functions as it ought to' (Plantinga 1993: 45). Accordingly, how we answer questions about knowledge will turn on what we take human knowers and their world to be like. Plantinga thus enables us to recognize the hopelessness of stepping outside of our cognitive faculties and our ways of taking the world to be in order to justify them antecedently. In a similar way, Alston's 'doxastic practice approach to epistemology' helps us to acknowledge the same limit regarding *all* our doxastic practices.

Central to an Alstonian doxastic practice is 'a system or constellation of dispositions or habits, or to use a currently fashionable term, "mechanisms", each of which yields a belief as output that is related in a certain way to an "input"' (Alston 1991: 153). It should be noted that 'dispositions or habits' include not only native human equipment but *learned* habits as well. Most importantly, the belief outputs of doxastic practices are prima facie justified. Alston essentially extends Thomas Reid's point—that cognitive faculties are justified practically—to cover every socially established doxastic practice. 'Reid's point', Alston explains, 'is that the only (external) basis we have for trusting [our cognitive faculties] is that they are firmly established doxastic practices, so firmly established that we "cannot help it"'. There just are no non-circular evidential supports for any of our 'sources of belief', and thus 'we take our standing *within* SP [sense perceptual doxastic practice] and other familiar practices that have become firmly established, psychologically and socially, in our lives, and we feel free to use their output' (Alston 1991: 149–51, emphasis in original). It is rational to engage in these practices, and so rational to suppose them to be reliable. Though all doxastic practices may be regarded as 'prima facie rationally engaged in', as epistemic agents monitor their belief-formation, they sometimes detect anomalies in the 'outputs' generated. Thus doxastic practices include not only the mechanisms of belief-formation but 'distinctive ways of assessing and correcting the beliefs so formed'; that is, 'overrider systems' (153, 158–9, 178). Alston presses this doxastic practice theory into service of justifying theism by claiming for Christian Mystical Practice (CMP), within which practitioners claim to perceive God, a 'practical rationality' akin to that possessed by SP: it is rational to engage in CMP and rational to regard its output beliefs as prima facie justified (194).

Some—notably, Sarah Coakley—have questioned what contribution Alston's 'Theory of Appearing' is supposed to make to this account of doxastic practices (Coakley 2009: 306–7). This theory holds that 'the notion of X's appearing to S as so-and-so is fundamental and unanalyzable.... For S to perceive X is simply for X to appear to S as so-and-so.... [T]hat is all there is to the *concept* of perception' (Alston 1991: 55, emphasis in original). It might seem that this theory's purpose is to set perceptual beliefs on unambiguous, indubitable foundations. Perceptual beliefs, on this reading, would not admit of scrutiny because any anthropogenic (e.g. interpretive) element in perception would have been excised. In this case, the theory of appearing could be said to reduce doxastic perceptual practices to mere mechanical processes. 'Practice' here would be a misnomer, though, for practices require *agents*, not merely mechanisms. If this understanding of the Theory of Appearing truly got at what Alston was using it for, then, in the case of perceptual 'practices', there would be nothing for the 'overrider systems' to do (other than, say, call to mind how much alcohol has been consumed, etc.). We suspect, however, that this understanding does not get at that for which Alston enlisted this theory. Its minimal role in Alston's argument comes out subtly in the above quoted passage: 'that is all there is to the *concept* of perception', yet apparently not to perceptual *practice*.

We think, rather, that Alston's purpose for this theory is more modest: it claims the *concept* of perception is irreducibly realist. When one perceives things, they are 'now *present* to me; they occupy space in my visual [or other perceptual] field. They are *given* to my awareness in a way that sharply contrasts with anything I can do by my own devices to conjure them up in imagination, memory, or abstract thought' (Alston 1991: 36–7, emphasis in original). That is, perception is *not* anthropogenic all the way down. One may lack a concept for a thing, yet that thing will not be missing from one's perceptual field. Elsewhere, Alston attends significantly to anthropogenic conceptualization in perceptual doxastic *practice* (27). For instance, a pervasive characteristic of perceptual practice is the use of various 'objective concepts' rather than 'phenomenal concepts'. That is, people (except very rarely) report what sorts of object (a bald eagle, a white Burgundy, or whatever) are present to them rather than what patterns of sensory qualia are so present (44–8). People do so by means of background knowledge and acquired skills of grouping sensory qualia into objective types (46 and n. 34). This background knowledge and these skills are constituent 'mechanisms' of perceptual doxastic practice and so their reliability will be justified, together with the other 'mechanisms', *practically* (48).

Even though we cannot entirely agree with Sarah Coakley's criticisms of Alston's Theory of Appearing, we find that her argument on the matter contains crucial insights concerning the importance of training for perceptual practice. In short, Coakley is dissatisfied with a presumed parity between perception of God and perception of the kinds of middle-sized dry goods to which such a theory is suited. Coakley argues that the mechanical kind of passivity she finds this theory asserting of perceivers of dogs or Porsches or trees is not the kind of passivity needed to perceive God, according to the 'spiritual senses' tradition to which Coakley has recently been calling attention. The one who perceives a tree perceives it, whether she wants to or not, in virtue of the impact it makes on her perceptual field. *That* is the passivity Coakley regards Alston as asserting of SP. The perceptual beliefs formed within SP are a function of human equipment, operating statically and largely automatically. The one who perceives God, however, on the account of, say, Teresa of Ávila, needs a rather different sort of passivity, indeed a passive receptivity that requires *active* training. This is a passivity acquired through ecclesial practices (Coakley 2009: 294–301, 306–8). We would find Coakley's criticism well taken *if* the Theory of Appearing were supposed to be an epistemological or metaphysical theory. But it is not; Alston said so himself (see Coakley 2009: 307 n.81). It clarifies what is involved in the concept of perception. However, it does not exhaust what needs to be said about perceptual practices, not even SP.

Coakley's critique, however, has the decided value of accentuating the importance of *training* for the perception of God. In Coakley's judgement, Alston's attempt to situate epistemology in the practical context of religious belief-formation is hampered by his pervasive reliance on mechanical metaphors for belief-formation (e.g. 'inputs' and 'outputs', which 'have the ring of the factory workshop'). In Coakley's view, the 'dryly mechanistic' nature of Alston's model threatens to occlude attention to the epistemic *nurturing* that occurs in religious practice; to the possibility that meditative, contemplative, ascetical practice might effect an epistemic *transformation* of the knower, capacitating her for '*new* levels of perception and sensation, *new* ways of "perceiving God" ' (Coakley 2009: 304, emphasis in original). In other words, Alston's mechanical picture disregards the possibility that knowing subjects can grow and mature in ways a machine cannot. With Coakley, we look on mechanistic epistemological models with suspicion. We are sceptical even of the idea that mechanism is the limiting case for socio-organic processes. Mechanistic models are dull to, and so risk occluding attention to, the progressively sensitive attunement of human animals to the subtle warp and weft of the bio-psycho-social world we inhabit, and much more to the hidden presence of God in that world.

Nicholas Wolterstorff has argued that Alston's doxastic practice theory remains hampered by regnant epistemological stances that Wolterstorff characterizes as 'epistemolog[ies] of an immobile, solitary reactor' (hereafter, EISR). Wolterstorff characterizes EISR in this way:

> The picture that comes to mind … is that of a solitary person sitting in a chair passively receiving such sensory stimulation as comes his way, taking note of the beliefs that that stimulation evokes in him, recalling certain events from his past, observing what is going on in his mind, and drawing inferences. It's the epistemology of a *reactor*: someone who receives stimulation and then goes off on his own interior line of thought. It's the epistemology of a *solitary* reactor: almost no attention is paid to other persons—to the role of testimony in our lives, for example. And it's the epistemology of an *immobile* solitary reactor…. The body enters the picture only so far as sensory stimulation requires a body…. How different is the actuality, which presumably it is the task of epistemology to illuminate.
>
> (Wolterstorff 2010: 86, emphasis in original)

In Wolterstorff's judgement, Alston's doxastic practice theory is marked by EISR to the extent that it is fundamentally *reactive*. Action enters into Alston's doxastic practices primarily to shore up fundamentally passive processes. Belief-formation is governed by 'mechanisms' that the (passive, disengaged) agent *monitors*, and it is only with the corrective 'overrider system' that the agent is voluntarily and actively involved in the knowing process (Wolterstorff 2010: 100–1).

To be fair, Alston does show *some* attentiveness to the ways that active practice can stratify planes (plural) of sensitivity and perception; more so than his governing mechanistic metaphors and his passive Theory of Appearing might suggest. For example:

> Why suppose that the outputs of a practice are unworthy of acceptance because it is engaged in by only a part of the population? Why this predilection for egalitarianism in the epistemic sphere, where its credentials are much less impressive than in the political sphere? Why suppose it to be an a priori truth that truth is less likely to be available to a part of the population than to the whole? *We are familiar with many areas in which only a small percentage of the population has developed the perceptual sensitivity to certain features of the world—for example, the distinctive qualities of wines and the inner voices of a complex orchestral performance.* I can see no good reason for excluding deeply rooted epistemic practices that are engaged in by only a part of the population.
>
> (Alston 1991: 169, emphasis added)

This is a very important point: 'certain features of the world' are imperceptible to some, many, or most people. This is not because their perceptual fields lack these features, but because they have not been trained to *attend* to these features in the relevant ways. This will be a crucial point for subsequent sections of this chapter.

Alston helps us to realize that we have no alternative but to trust our belief-forming practices and allow them to be justified by their success practically. However, for reasons that will become apparent in the next section, we prefer Wolterstorff's epistemological model for the way that it accentuates epistemic agency and progressiveness. In this regard, Wolterstorff's epistemological work represents a promising move away from EISR and towards 'an epistemology of the socially engaged mobile agent' (Wolterstorff 2010: 90–1). The key concepts of this move are 'ways of finding things out' and 'practices of inquiry' (hereafter, WoFTO/PoI). WoFTO/PoI are so named from sequences of actions that one could use to find something out. But Wolterstorff stresses that WoFTO/PoI are really only infelicitous shorthand for several doxastic practices, not just for finding out *facts*. He also includes ways of remembering and attending to things under these shorthand terms. We might, for instance, learn to attend sensitively to the baffling films of Terrence Malick, and this would be a WoFTO/PoI on Wolterstorff's definition. Moreover, WoFTO/PoI comprehend ways of acquiring 'apprehensions of things, acquaintances with things: apprehensions of unfamiliar things, more discriminating acquaintances with familiar things'. These may not aim at knowledge or belief-production as their goal but rather some other goal, for example, aesthetic appreciation (Wolterstorff 2010: 93). Nonetheless, such practices are WoFTO/PoI, for they bring knowers into more comprehensive, deeper, or more sensitive cognitive contact with their world. In a highly suggestive move, Wolterstorff looks to Alasdair MacIntyre's theory of social practices to better understand (thus broadly construed) doxastic practices. We should now like to explore the implications of this opening to the epistemic significance of social practices.

## MacIntyrean Practices

### An Example MacIntyrean Practice: Engineering

Our account of 'practices' here will extend Wolterstorff's notion of WoFTO/PoI in a way that does justice to the complex, chaotic, entropic reality of living systems. We aim to show that the kind of 'practice' we have in mind *precedes* the act of perception. We proceed in two steps. First, we describe an everyday practice whose reliable belief-formation no one questions. Second we will generalize our description by referring to Alasdair MacIntyre's definition. Our final section will suggest that ecclesial practices, like all practices, train bodies to see what the untrained are unable to detect. Our conclusion will be that 'the trained eye' of the practitioner (e.g. the engineer) may be a better analogue to perceiving God than perceiving a tree is. We proceed first simply to sketch the practical nature of engineering according to some of its characteristic marks: *wicked problems, dynamic similarity, design reasoning, satisfactoriness, tacit knowing*, and *skilled perception*; notions which have analogues in *all* practices, including ecclesial practices.

The practice of engineering is not reducible to theoretical sciences (Vincenti 1982). In fact, scientific theory often *follows* engineering breakthroughs rather than predicts them. For example, James Watt had a working steam engine prior to thermodynamics explaining *how* such a thing was possible. But if engineering is not merely applied science, what is it? Engineering is the ongoing cooperative attempt to respond to an entropic world. In other words, engineering is a social form of coping with a gritty world in which things tend to bend, bind, break, rust, melt, and generally fall apart (this description of engineering derives surprisingly from thirteenth-century theologian Hugh of St Victor; see Kallenberg 2013: 248–75). One long-time insider to the practice has aptly described engineering as a 'strategy for causing the best change in a poorly understood situation within the available resources' (Koen 2003: 9). Note the emphasis on limits: engineering must not only make do with limited resources, but also do so within situations that are inherently poorly understood. It is the opacity of its problems that makes engineering akin to aesthetics; the longer one looks, the more there is to see. This is unlike mathematics: redoing a problem will not improve on an already true answer! Yet in engineering, one returns to problems repeatedly—not simply because the conditions of the problem have changed (there is no one-size-fits-all solution), nor only because the field will surely have advanced, but also because the engineer herself at a later time may be able to *see* something new in the problem and/or will have gained skills enabling her to generate an entirely innovative response.

For engineering design problems there is never a single solution to a problem that stands alone as *the* 'right' answer. This is not to say that anything goes, for some proposals (for example, those that do not work or cannot be built) are rejected out of hand. But, for the very large number of live options remaining on the design table, each proposal must be judged for its fitness against its rivals. And yet, contrary to popular opinion, this urgent choice between rivals is not resolved by mathematical proof that yields a single, 'right' answer.

Engineers frequently face design problems that are 'wicked' (Rittel and Webber 1984). One mark of a wicked problem is that it does not reduce to a common denominator in terms of which rival proposals can be adjudicated. For example, if a problem can be addressed chemically *or* mechanically, in what terms can 'better' be spelled out? Yet decisions must be made. The trickiness of comparing apples to orangutans means that the sort of modelling employed within engineering is what Heinrich Hertz called 'dynamical', which is to say, crucially dependent upon the highly nuanced *dunamis* (powers or, better, *skills*) of the modeller (Kallenberg 2013: 121–46; Sterrett 2002 and 2006).

When called upon to respond to a wicked problem, engineers employ 'design reasoning'. Design reasoning is externalist, active, and cooperative. It is measured against the metric of logic, but only in part, and negatively: a 'good' designer must not trespass the canons of logic. Yet logic is powerless to *compel* the choice of one proposed design over another. So then, is engineering a matter of personal taste? No. The important, hard work of design happens in the middle, between the dual myths: the Scylla of 'only one right answer' and the Charybdis of 'anything goes'. Anthony Kenny (1976) has dubbed the primary metric governing the middle as 'satisfactoriness'. Satisfactoriness is a slippery concept indeed, for no one size fits all and it very often cannot be spelled out in advance of 'looking and seeing'. In deliberating over the relative degree of satisfactoriness of a given proposal, contextual details matter in ways that they do not matter within arguments of deductive logic. If 'all men are mortal' and 'Socrates is a man', it does not affect the conclusion to learn that 'Socrates has a pug nose'. But if 'seeking shelter in this cave' is an otherwise satisfactory response to an impending downpour, it matters enormously whether a bear already occupies the cave. Reliance on details does not make design reasoning *less* logical than theoretical reasoning, nor *illogical*, but simply logical in a different way. Design reasoning constitutes a different mode of being rational, which of course Aristotle called 'practical' reasoning (for a clear and accessible account of practical reasoning in the sense that we are using 'design reasoning', see McCabe 1986).

Of course, not every detail is relevant (the cave may be inhabited by a moth rather than a bear). Therefore, one of the most important questions facing the practical reasoner is this: how does one reliably spot just those details that are relevant? If a violinist played with one string badly out of tune, we would charge him with an unsatisfactory practical response to the occasion of a concert. If he said he did not notice the tuning problem, we would be doubly horrified: first because a skilled player is expected to spot tuning as relevant, and second because even we as mere listeners *know* that good music *ought* to be in tune.

Ordinarily epistemologists want to take as a baseline the perceptions of the ordinary person whose sensory and cognitive faculties are in good working order. But our argument leans the other way. More often than not, people lie along a continuum, with the most opaque claims being made by practitioners who operate at the *upper* edge of what is known, in which arenas it is sheer folly to say, 'We ordinary folk all know how it should be'. The illustration of the shoddy violinist trades on a widely shared *general* knowledge of music. That the audience can spot shoddiness simply shows the extent to which the player is one of us and not yet a 'violinist'. In truth, spectators cannot share a practitioner's knowledge. Therefore, we who lack adequate engineering training cannot supply a ready-made *engineering* example of 'details relevant to a design problem'. This is not very satisfying. And it leaves our sense of democracy entirely offended. But so it is with *all* practices. There are *countless* domains of knowledge that (more or less) elude the spectator because they are accessible only to those who have gone through the paces to be trained within the correlative practice. Even within such a practice 'knowledge' is not shared evenly throughout the population. There always remains a small class of expert practitioners who alone are in the best position and condition to recognize which details are relevant, what counts as justification, and so on. These experts are unable to convey by means of propositions what it is that they know in ways that would enlighten the novice, much less the *untrained* spectator. Some knowledge the experts possess falls into the class of knowing called 'tacit' (Gascoigne and Thornton 2013; Toulmin 2001: 102–37).

By 'tacit knowing' we mean knowledge possessed by one's body that *cannot* be conveyed by means of propositions (Damasio 2005). Granted, words may be used to label an experience (e.g. 'the smell of coffee brewing'), but one could not by means of labels convey the *smell* of coffee to one who has never before smelled brewing coffee. Likewise, 'partial differential equations' mean *something*—but only to those who have first learned to solve ordinary differential equations.

Granted, sometimes tacit knowing has theoretical equivalence. An experienced structural engineer may be able to 'eyeball' the proper width of an I-beam, but she would also arrive at the same dimension by doing the calculations. But important for our case is the fact that it is logically possible for there to be occasions in which what is known is simply unutterable. On the centrality of 'feel' to engineering judgement, Robert Zussman's view is typical:

> To argue, as I have … that engineering skills are rarely theoretical and often not even technical is different from arguing that engineering is unskilled work. To the contrary, engineering often involves highly complex skills, many of which are learned only through industrial practice and over the course of a long career. But these skills require experience and a '*feel*' for things—for a particular machine or process, for an organization and its personnel—as much, if not more, than scientific training.
>
> (Zussman 1985: 75, emphasis added)

In such cases, words that accompany tacit knowledge function as 'heuristics', which is to say prescriptions for acting in a manner such that the novice may, over time, be likely to gain the knowledge (Koen 2003: 26–58). How did our parents impart to us the knowledge of balancing on two wheels? Ironically by telling us what was counter-intuitive at the time: 'go faster!' (for it is far more difficult to balance at slow speeds). It is this whole complex of mentor-guided activities directed towards the end of tacit learning that makes up, at least in part, the practical nature of engineering.

To say that tacit knowing is 'bodily' is to claim that an analogy exists between the kind of perceptual capacities that Plantinga takes as fundamental to *properly functioning* humans and the kind of perception enjoyed by a *properly trained* engineer. When an engineer judges a bridge to be dangerous, it is not an instance of *seeing-as*, as though she could opt to see it otherwise. Nor is the engineer's judgement a deductively formed conclusion that follows from major and minor premises. Rather, it is an act of perception akin to sensory perception in its immediacy but differing because the practitioner's faculties have been more intentionally *trained*. She has been trained to attend to the bridge's features in ways the non-practitioner is unable to, and so her perception has acquired greater depth than that of the untrained spectator. She sees more. It is the perception of something real, as real to her as the cup that I perceive on the table is to me. Just as listeners are right in general to trust the virtuoso's highly trained 'ear', consumers are equally rational to deem trustworthy the engineer's 'eye' (Koen 2003: 34).

This summary of engineering has aimed to make explicit what seems commonly assumed, namely that our world has endless 'aesthetic' depth that unfailingly repays repeated looks. We do not read the useful bits off the *surface* of the world. Rather, we become practitioners who through training grow capable of perceiving what was once undetectable but is now seen in the hues of our particular practice(s). So numerous are these practices, and so variously embedded are we in one or more of them, that our conclusion in this chapter is that *trained* perception is the epistemological baseline. In other words, the more plausible analogue for 'perceiving *Deus absconditus*' is not 'a certain determinate configuration of specific sensory qualia' (Alston 1991: 155) but rather 'a faulty bridge' as perceived by the trained eye of the structural engineer.

## MacIntyre's Definition

Human beings are *homo prudens*, the *practical* animal. Had Crusoe not met 'man Friday', it is unclear whether he would have survived the shipwreck by his wits alone. His chances were greatly improved by salvaging well-engineered artefacts from the ship's wreckage and by the helpful cooperation of man Friday. Likewise, our survival as an animal species has much to do with our ability to join with others in applying our collective wits to the uncertain task of coping with our highly contingent environment. This social art of coping takes many unique forms: medicine, carpentry, farming, hunting, and architecture are all practices. MacIntyre's definition of practice proceeds thus:

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.
>
> (MacIntyre 1984: 187)

Three observations suffice. First, practices, as whole social enterprises, are marked by progress (as in the case of internal medicine) or alternatively of decline (alchemy; the basic Hegelian–Darwinian plot line is clear; for an insightful account of the training of spiritual senses that fits within a framework of evolutionary biology, see Coakley 2012). The progress of a practice entails the possibility of progress by each human practitioner in terms of improved 'powers to achieve excellence' and clarification of the 'conceptions of the ends and goods' sought for by the practice. Yet this is not mechanical; progress is not automatic. Second, the notion of practice entails the timefulness of coming-to-know. The question 'How do I know?' is answered very differently by the novice than by the expert practitioner. For the bulk of the population (who admittedly are novices to all practices but their own), the question is answered simply: 'Follow the prescribed path!' Of course, as MacIntyre is quick to point out, the rejoinder 'But which path?' is forever premature. For only as one gains skills by following diligently in the prescribed way will one eventually become skilful enough to deliberate whether another path may be 'better'. Such adjudication is itself a socially deliberated issue and thus always beyond the ken of the lone novice.

Third, the development of the agent, that is his or her growth in the skills of perception, is never reducible to mere ideational development. MacIntyre strongly resists the modern penchant for bifurcating knowing and doing. Rather, all knowing (believing) is a doing, and all doing is bodily in nature. This is decidedly not a concession to the trivial fact that corpses do not calculate sums. Rather, thinkers from Aristotle to MacIntyre are making the more profound point that even the doing of sums involves bodily tasks, not the least of which is perceiving *which* are the relevant details (such as counting each item only once, knowing the difference between counting musical notes (or the years of a monarch's reign) and counting apples, and so on).

## Ecclesial Practices and Epistemic Transformation

So far, we have taken from Plantinga and Alston that it is hopeless to expect to justify the truth-reliability of our cognitive faculties and our doxastic practices without using those very faculties and practices. We rather trust them, make use of them, and correct them as we go along *in medias res*. From Wolterstorff, we have taken the understanding that doxastic practices need not aim at knowledge or belief-production per se and include in fact any practice that affects our ability to apprehend features of the world. Seizing on Wolterstorff's suggestive association of doxastic practices with the social practice theory of Alasdair MacIntyre, we have so far argued that (1) practices are extremely widespread in human community, (2) bodily formation-for-perceiving is how practices function, and (3) by bodily training practitioners grow to see/perceive (*aisthesis*) what was heretofore *invisible*. (Because of this continuum of seeing, philosophers cannot simply step lightly from 'I can't see it' to 'therefore it doesn't exist!' (Wykstra 1990).) Accordingly, it is plausible that some sort of practice—call it 'ecclesial'—offered to novices by practitioners (namely 'saints') who claim to perceive will indeed turn out to be a means by which novices may grow to perceive the 'invisible'. Ecclesial practices must be entertained as logically possible means of 'epistemic transformation', to use Sarah Coakley's idiom. In arguing for dependence on saintly practitioners, we are strongly agreeing with virtue epistemologist Linda Zagzebski's conclusion, in her discussion of religious knowledge, that:

> we acquire many kinds of knowledge, including religious knowledge, by imitating those who have it, the people whose wisdom we admire.... This is the way we learn a specialized field of learning or a skill.... There are methods developed by the best practitioners of each field that are transmitted to the next generation during the course of the practice of the field. The same point applies to methods of meditation and contemplation. With luck, imitating an exemplar of spiritual wisdom can result in acquiring some of the most important truths a human being can learn.
>
> (Zagzebski 2011: 397–8)

We should only like to clarify that the knowledge so acquired through imitation of 'exemplars' is not limited to important propositional truths only. Of course spiritual exemplars *may* instruct or remind the less mature of many such truth-bearing sentences, but we are more concerned here with the kind of knowledge that Gilbert Ryle called 'knowing-how' (Ryle 1945).

In the present context, we use the phrase 'know-how' to indicate a tacit perceptual knowing acquired through such mentored practices as prayer, contemplation, fasting, and mercy (clothe the naked, shelter the refugee, visit the prisoner, treat the sick, etc.), a knowing-how to attend to God's presence in the world. Acquiring this know-how is internally related to deepening acquaintance with the divine other. This brings us to the 'spiritual senses' tradition, a strand of Christian thought and practice stretching back through Origen to scriptural antecedents, who have held all along that human beings, when transformed through ecclesial practices, become progressively more capable of perceiving God. According to Olivier Clément, the difference brought about by this transformation of bodily patterns of action (i.e. by taking on the virtues of Christ) yields a difference in *attention*. 'Let us be attentive', the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom exhorts. So Clément, relying on Evagrius, Gregory of Nyssa, Isaac of Nineveh, and Maximus the Confessor, tells us that '[c]ontemplation begins only after the completion of ascetical exercises (*praxis*), the aim of which is the achievement of interior freedom (*apatheia*), that is to say, the possibility of loving'. When we can give creatures 'a little loving attention in the light of the Risen Christ', we will see the Logos hidden in all created things, and, as Isaac tells us, our hearts will break and our eyes weep for all their sufferings. Clément quotes from Maximus: 'When he [the Logos] rises in a mind that has been purified, he makes himself seen in addition to the *logoi* of the objects he has created'; the Logos, 'while hiding himself for our benefit in a mysterious way, in the *logoi*, shows himself to our minds to the extent of our ability to understand.... Thus he gathers us together in himself, through every object ... enabling us to rise into union with him'. Moreover, Clément suggests that the *direct* contemplation of God comes after, and stands in continuity with, this loving attention to God in creatures, 'the giver through the gift' (Clément 1993: 210, 213–27).

In a similar vein Sarah Coakley argues that perception, like referring, does not name one essential thing but is rather a layered, family resemblance concept. Perception admits of depths (Coakley 2002: 144–6). As one can be trained to see 'with practice', as we argued in the third section, so Coakley suggests spiritual training may be a prerequisite for seeing spiritual things. This training corrects (in part) sin's noetic effects; integrates the knower's intellect, affections, and senses ('the noetic and the erotic'); cultivates the knower in a posture of epistemic receptivity (in Coakley's view, the 'ostensibly "feminine" posture of virgin/lover'); and thereby opens the knower to dispossession by the Spirit (Coakley 2002: 137; 2008: 313–14; 2009: 294, 300, 304). By such means, the knower becomes disposed to perceive (not by cognitively grasping but by being graciously grasped by) God—in Eucharistic bread and wine, in faces of the poor, in her own reflection, in the starry heavens above, in trees, and birds, and all things. This modality of transformed perception, Coakley points out, is open to analysis in Plantinga's idiom of proper functioning, and its progressive nature renders it akin to recent virtue epistemology. 'Cognitive contact with reality', to borrow Zagzebski's phrase, does not lie upon a 'flat plane', but is expandable, perfectible, capable of divinization. As we have argued here at some length, pre-theological perception already admits of depth, already does not lie upon a 'flat plane'. Spiritual epistemic transformation, then, might have its analogue in the practised attention of the engineer, or doctor, or carpenter, or farmer, or architect, or, for that matter, a parent of young children.

## CONCLUSION

We have so far advanced a modest claim: that it is logically possible that ecclesial practices are means of epistemic transformation disposing practitioners to new modes of graced spiritual perception. This theological-epistemological possibility is opened up for us by the Reformed epistemologists' displacement of epistemology from the position of first philosophy. If our faculties and doxastic practices justify themselves practically, we can see our social doxastic practices as properly antecedent to, and formative for, epistemic assessments of their reliability. Accordingly, social doxastic practices need not wait for permission from a positive probability assessment in order for engaging in them to be rational (*pace* Swinburne 2005). Moreover, the possibility of graced spiritual perception is anticipated at the pre-theological level in the pervasive phenomenon of social practices, wherein practitioners (socially, timefully) are trained in modes of attentiveness wherein their perceptions acquire new depth.

We conclude by observing that many voices in the Christian tradition go well beyond our modest claim—that training for spiritual perception is not impossible—and exhort their interlocutors to take on ecclesial practice as the chief means by which they might 'taste and see that the Lord is good' (Ps. 34:8).

The spiritual sense tradition has forever maintained that the quality of one's knowledge of divine things—in contemporary epistemological idiom, knowledge by acquaintance—is a function of the quality of one's character, which is to say one's regular (habitual) bodily activities. Such a view is evident in the Hebrew Bible as well as the Christian scriptures. For example, the author to the Hebrews wrote: 'But solid food is for the mature [cognate of *telos*] who through practice [*hexis* = steady state; the ultimate endpoint of character formation] have trained [cognate of 'gymnastics'] their senses [cognate of *aisthesis*] to discern good and evil' (Heb. 5:14; NASB; see also Ez. 12:2; Lk. 24:30–1; Mk. 8:17–18; cf. Jer. 5:21f; 2 Cor. 3:18). Writers such as Athanasius in the West were echoed by theologians like Pseudo-Dionysius in the East. Isaac of Nineveh is particularly poignant: 'Especially those who are *trained in praying* unto Him and who bear suffering for His sake, *see* clearly in colours' (emphasis added).

> Let excellence be reckoned by thee as the body, contemplation as the soul. The two [form] one complete spiritual man, composed of sensible and intelligible parts. And as it is not possible that the soul reach existence and birth without the accomplished

> formation of the body, so it is not possible that contemplation, the second soul, the spirit of revelations, be formed in the womb of the intellect which receives the fullness of spiritual seed, without the corporeal performance of excellence, the dwelling place of the knowledge which receives revelations.

Isaac generalizes his maxim, 'Spiritual knowledge is posterior to the performance of excellence' (Isaac of Nineveh 1923: 2, 12, 21).

Likewise in the West, we read Blaise Pascal's advice:

> Endeavor then to convince yourself, not by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement of your passions. You would like to attain faith, and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc. Even this will naturally make you believe.
>
> (Cited in Tilley 1995: 23)

Terrence Tilley helpfully comments on the logic of this passage that one who takes on the practices of faith 'will naturally develop beliefs about God and God's worshipfulness … not because more arguments pile up, but because the interlocutor will become, through engaging in religious practices, a rather different person'. That is, she 'will become a person who can be awestruck by *les espaces infinis* and *see* through the book of nature to the Mind that wrote it' (Tilley 1995: 24, second emphasis added). Practices change the epistemic agent, and the change (to throw this into Plantinga's expression) ripples both 'upstream' and 'downstream' from the agent's doxastic experience. This chapter has been concerned principally with effects 'upstream'. (For consideration of the effect of ecclesial practice on matters 'downstream', i.e. of ways that the socially cultivated 'illative sense' informs theological judgement, see Aquino 2004: Chs 4 and 5). That is, what the epistemic agent perceives, how the world seems to her to be, have been transformed by the renewal of her body and mind through ascetic discipline resulting in loving attentiveness. She or he has, in the words of Pseudo-Macarius that follow, become all gazing: 'The prophet Ezekiel speaks of the four Living Creatures harnessed to the Lord's chariot. He says that they had countless eyes. In the same way the soul that seeks God—rather I mean the soul that is sought by God—is no longer anything but gazing' (Clément 1993: 185).

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## CHAPTER 10

# SPIRITUAL FORMATION, AUTHORITY, AND DISCERNMENT

FREDERICK D. AQUINO

An important feature of spiritual formation involves finding reliable processes, people, practices, and materials that put one in the best position to cultivate the spiritual life and to achieve the specified goals. Some of these goals, for example, include (1) the cultivation of a stable, tranquil, and properly disposed mind (e.g. purity of heart); (2) the capacity to map aptly the practical and contemplative aspects of the spiritual life and thereby regulate the relevant practices and virtues towards their proper end (e.g. discernment); and (3) the acquisition of the ideal epistemic state of the spiritual life (e.g. the vision of God). The pursuit and attainment of these goals requires considerable training as well as the transformation of the whole person. Along these lines, people within a communal context learn, under the tutelage of spiritual directors, how to open themselves up to being cognitively, volitionally, and affectively transformed. As I hope to show, there are some epistemological features that are integral to this transformative process of spiritual formation.

Accordingly, I structure this chapter in the following way. The first section will draw attention to some works that connect philosophy (including some epistemological themes and issues) and spirituality (including the topic of spiritual formation). The second will spell out some of the main features of John Cassian's (*c.*360–435 CE) account of spiritual formation. In particular, it will focus on his understanding of the penultimate and ultimate goals of spiritual formation, of the importance of relying on others for making progress in the spiritual life and achieving the relevant epistemic goods, and of the three indicators that help determine whether a person is a reliable spiritual authority. The third section will identify briefly three areas that deserve further epistemological attention, clarification, and development.

## CONNECTING SPIRITUALITY AND PHILOSOPHY

There has been a growing interest in thinking critically and constructively about the intersection of philosophy and spirituality and in showing how insights from various disciplines contribute to the task of providing robust accounts of spirituality. However, this is neither the time nor the place to take up all of the different lines of investigation. Instead, I will focus briefly on the works of Pierre Hadot, John Cottingham, Harriet Harris, Sarah Coakley, and Paul Moser (for further constructive and critical reflection on the relevant themes, questions, and issues, see McNulty 1980; McIntosh 1998; McGhee 1992 and 2000; Frances 2008; Anderson 2009; White 2013; Rickabaugh 2013; Wynn 2013; and Porter 2014).

Pierre Hadot has played a key role in drawing attention to and unpacking the connection between spirituality and philosophy in antiquity. More specifically, he has argued that ancient philosophy was concerned with nothing less than the 'art of living'; in fact, he has claimed that the modern notion of spiritual exercises actually was rooted in the conception of philosophy as a way of life in antiquity. Philosophy as a way of life involved a series of spiritual exercises that aimed at regulating the inner activities of the self (e.g. ordering the passions) and at making spiritual progress towards attaining the ideal state of wisdom. Some of them included 'research (*zetesis*), thorough investigation (*skepsis*), reading (*anagnosis*), listening (*akroasis*), attention (*prosoche*), [and] self-mastery (*enkrateia*)'. The goal of these exercises was to form within people 'a *habitus*, or new capacity to judge and to criticize; and to *transform*—that is, to change people's way of living and of seeing the world' (Hadot 1995: 84; Hadot 2002: 274).

An important aspect of philosophy as a way of life involved learning how to enter into dialogue. A spiritual exercise of this sort required interlocutors (within a particular philosophical school) to undergo a process of self-transformation, the aim of which was to put them in a better position to transcend their own points of view and discover truth. As a result, they took up within such an environment the relevant philosophical topics in accordance with the demands of rational discourse. The teacher here served as a 'spiritual director' and accordingly adapted the teaching and discussion to the 'spiritual level' of the students at hand (Hadot 1995: 62, 64; see also Demacopoulos 2007: 175 n. 3; for an appreciative, though critical, appraisal of Hadot's characterization of philosophy as a way of life in the ancient world, see Cooper 2012: x, 17–23, 29).

John Cottingham concurs with Hadot's emphasis on the transformative aspect of philosophy and likewise aims to connect spirituality and philosophy, but with a more constructive proposal in mind. In particular, he seeks to carve out a more 'humane' model for philosophy of religion, especially in terms of an 'epistemology of involvement' that pays greater attention to the context and practices that form and shape a religious way of life. However, an epistemology of involvement does not suggest uncritical submission to what religious traditions say; nor does it rule out critical modes of examination. Instead, it seeks to maintain 'the virtues of a critical philosophical methodology' (e.g. conceptual clarity; logical analysis; rigorous argumentation) while connecting 'the subject more closely with the moral and spiritual sensibilities that have shaped religious belief over the centuries, and which continue to inform the lives of believers today'. The aim here is to broaden the scope of philosophical reflection by including 'the resources of human experience that are relevant to the shaping of a philosophically rounded worldview' (e.g. music, scripture, and other literature), and to allow the relevant insights to 'work on our imagination and enrich our understanding' (Cottingham 2014: 11, 22–3, 176).

Though Cottingham acknowledges the virtues of analytic philosophy (especially when the focus is on the logical status of beliefs), he claims that a 'proper philosophical understanding of religion requires us to take account of much more' (Cottingham 2014: 148). To be religious, for example, includes following a particular way of life, not simply accepting particular doctrines or engaging in intellectual analysis (although these are important for the formation of religious beliefs). As a project of self-transformation (or formation), religion as a way of life calls for a process of training (*askēsis*) or of learning (*mathēsis*) that is brought about by taking up the relevant rules and practices. Spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting, and meditation have a transformative function insofar as they cultivate a kind of receptivity and facilitate a long-term process of growth in wisdom and a deeper love of the good:

> Just as the proper understanding of a certain sort of text involves a process of yielding, of porousness to the power of the literature; and just as properly understanding one's own emotional responses is often best achieved not by detached impartial scrutiny but by listening to the signals from within; so, in just the same way, the religious adherent may claim that the knowledge of God which is the goal of human life is to be found via the path of spiritual praxis—praxis that brings about an interior change, a receptivity, which is the essential precondition for the operation of grace.
>
> (Cottingham 2005: 12; see also Cottingham 2014: 18, 23)

However, Cottingham claims that the kind of understanding envisioned here is not merely 'an explanatory or analytic kind of understanding'; it includes 'a growing response to an active power that changes us, so that we cease to be mere detached investigators and start to see reality in radically transformed ways' (Cottingham 2014: 151).

Cottingham's (as well as Hadot's) emphasis on practice is important and relevant for rethinking the connection between spiritual formation and philosophical reflection on religion. Yet, how these practices in particular contribute to the pursuit of the relevant epistemic goods needs greater clarification. Along these lines, Harriet Harris calls for fuller accounts that spell out the role that religious practice and spiritual disciplines play in the formation of knowers and in the pursuit of the relevant epistemic goods. She contends that the analytic tradition of philosophy of religion has neglected this kind of enquiry. With recent work in virtue epistemology in mind, for example, she wonders whether spiritual disciplines and virtues could play a role in developing a deeper understanding of the relevant issues in philosophy of religion. How, for example, does 'programming in religious practice and spiritual disciplines' (e.g. prayer, contemplation) 'help us to become more competent knowers (or seers, or hearers or perceivers—no term is adequate) of religious realities' (Harris 2005: 101, 110)?

What Harris envisions is a more robust account of the interplay between the transformative practices of spirituality and the rigorous evaluation of our beliefs. The aim here is to develop the 'epistemological task in ways that take moral and spiritual development into account' (Harris 2005: 103; see also Harris 2001). For instance, she thinks that the recent work on proper function and warrant (e.g. Plantinga 2000) needs to include an exploration of how 'proper functioning is aided by the development of our cognitive faculties through communal, moral or spiritual nurture and by growth in discernment' (Harris 2005: 117; for the connection between Plantinga's proper function and virtue epistemology, see Roberts and Wood 2007). In what ways, for example, would such an emphasis 'open the way for epistemological attention to the development of our attunement with the *sensus divinitatis* and testimony of the Holy Spirit'? In sum, Harris thinks that the potential for exploring 'the significance of moral and spiritual development in influencing our ability to think well and improve our understanding' has not been realized (Harris 2005: 117, 115).

In addition, some have called for greater focus on the social contexts, practices, and training that shape the formation and attunement of spiritual perception. This is precisely the topic that Sarah Coakley thinks needs greater hermeneutical justice (especially in terms of reading and appropriating insights from mystical theologians). She likewise calls for richer accounts that show how contemplative and bodily practices 'expand' and 'transform' the 'epistemic function' and 'capacity' of spiritual perception '*over the long haul*' (Coakley 2009: 283, 294; see also Coakley 2002: esp. Ch. 8). For example, she appreciatively and critically takes up William Alston's seminal work, *Perceiving God*, and avers that it has made a significant contribution to the task of mapping out the epistemic underpinnings of religious experience (e.g. the extent to which experiential awareness of God provides the grounds of religious belief). She also understands why he focuses more on the value of religious experience for acquiring information about God than on how it fosters a personal relationship with God. However, she thinks that a disjunction of this sort in Alston's account is 'a revealing one'; for—as his 'heroine' Teresa of Ávila 'would surely herself insist—what can we rightly say about God unless we first enter into and sustain this relationship with God, and unless we take into account the revolutionary epistemic implications of such progressive submission to the divine?' What Teresa, in fact, envisions here is 'a *transformed* epistemic capacity in which affectivity, bodiliness and the traditional mental faculties are in some unique sense (through the long practices of prayer) aligned and made responsive to God' (Coakley 2009: 294, emphasis in original).

She also queries whether Alston's theory (and definition) of doxastic practices captures fully how belief-forming practices of a 'more subtle and sustained form' actually 'operate in the context of religious belief'. As a result, she wonders whether Alston's notion of doxastic practices could be 'extended to include meditative and contemplative practices'. For example, the 'gradual unification of the faculties, affections, and senses through these "practices" here cause, if Teresa's witness is reliable, a breakthrough over time into *new* levels of perception and sensation, *new* ways of "perceiving" God'. In addition to the move of justifying beliefs by means of doxastic practices that produce them, Coakley thinks we need social and communal ways of assessing 'ramified' religious claims (Coakley 2009: 304–5, emphasis in original). In my estimation, recent work in social epistemology, virtue epistemology, and feminist epistemology seems ripe for such an appropriation.

Paul Moser likewise attends to the relevant epistemological issues as they arise in the course of taking up topics within theology and spirituality. More specifically, he seeks to reorient religious epistemology and to reconceive the relationship between the volitional and the epistemological (see Moser 2008, 2010, 2013). In *The Severity of God*, for example, Moser argues that God's wisdom (e.g. God's corrective moral power in Gethsemane) provides both an alternative to human despair about the severity of human life and salient evidence of divine presence and redemptive deliverance. If one, however, wants to acquire wisdom concerning God's will, one must 'undergo a volitional makeover'. In this respect, Moser (largely informed by the writings of Paul the Apostle) makes a distinction between a Gethsemane (or cruciform) kind of spiritual wisdom (SW) and mere knowledge (MK) (e.g. one has genuine knowledge that *p* but has a 'defective volitional attitude' towards the reality in question). A person desiring SW, unlike MK, 'must be volitionally attuned to what is good in virtue of *welcoming* what is good when the opportunity arises'. So, those who desire to meet the volitional conditions of SW should expect 'evidence and knowledge of divine reality to be available to humans only in a manner suitable to divine *purposes* in self-revelation' (e.g. the redemptive transformation of human character). The relevant evidence is accordingly to be 'appropriated in a self-sacrificial struggle in response to a divine challenge to humans' (Moser 2013: 29, 32, 52f., emphasis in original).

Moser claims that most evidential expectations for God fail to match the kind of motives that a God worthy of worship requires from enquirers. For example, the expectation that God should supply uniformly accessible evidence misses the transformative purposes of God. Such expectations actually 'cloud human recognition and appropriation of the evidence for God that would be on offer'. Alternatively, the Gethsemane crisis illustrates the kind of volitional rigour that God calls for in our search for the divine. It also redirects the focus of religious epistemology; the human reception of divine love is 'a rigorous struggle to receive (as an unmerited gift) God's perfect character of love and thereby to trust God'. Conceived in this way, religious epistemology 'must be inherently *volitional* and not merely intellectual'. Yet, a volitional requirement of this sort does not mean that religious belief is 'exempt from the demands of evidence' or that it lacks 'cognitive support of any kind'. Rather, the divine pouring of *agapē* into our hearts 'is a salient *experience* that serves as the cognitive, evidential foundation of well-founded belief in God' (Moser 2013: 87, 94–5, 119–20, emphasis in original).

Moser accordingly offers some preliminary suggestions concerning what a distinctly Christian philosophy entails. More specifically, he calls for a Christian philosophy that is deeply shaped by spiritual and moral practices. A Gethsemane habit of mind is fundamental to the formation of Christian philosophers and Christ-shaped philosophy; the pouring out of *agapē* (via the Gethsemane struggle) is foundational for Christian identity and the acquisition of the relevant epistemic goods (e.g. knowledge of God). Thus, a robust Christian philosophy that proceeds with 'God in Christ' as its fundamental authority 'must accommodate the heart of what it is to be Christian, namely Gethsemane union with God in Christ as Lord'. The aim here is not simply to acquire true rather than false beliefs about Christ. Instead, the union envisioned here requires 'volitional cooperation and companionship with Christ, who empowers and guides *how* we think, not just *what* we think' (Moser 2013: 167–8, 184, 205, emphasis in original; see also Moser 2014). An emphasis of this sort 'suggests an indispensable moral and spiritual standard for Christian philosophy, courtesy of the Christ who is wisdom, righteousness, and redemption from God'. Even so, Moser's conception of Christian philosophy does not seek to undermine the pursuit of the relevant epistemic goods. Rather, it tries to explain how the 'Gethsemane prayer' (e.g. 'Father, not what I will, but what You will', Mk. 14:36) 'underwrites the central role for Christian spirituality in Christian philosophy and life' and how it also 'prompts' us to reconceive the relationship between the volitional and the epistemological in our desire to inquire about God (Moser 2013: 186, 205–6).

## John Cassian: Mapping the Spiritual Life

John Cassian's writings on the spiritual life have been endorsed and appropriated in Eastern as well as Western traditions of Christian spirituality. For example, selections from the *Conferences* and the *Institutes* are included in the *Philokalia* (a collection of texts written between the fourth and fifteenth centuries mostly by writers of the Eastern Orthodox tradition of spirituality). In fact, he is the only Latin author included in the *Philokalia* and in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (*Sayings of the Fathers*; a classic text that consists of sayings attributed to the desert fathers). In the *Rule of St Benedict* (*Regula Benedicti*), Benedict of Nursia (480–547 CE) recommends both of Cassian's writings (along with the Bible, *The Lives of the Fathers*, and the *Rules* of Basil of Caesarea) as important texts for understanding the spiritual contours of the monastic life. More importantly, his works are rich with epistemic possibilities insofar as they tackle (though not formally) some of the issues that are now receiving epistemological attention and treatment (e.g. the epistemic dimension of religious authority, the role that the virtues play in contributing to the pursuit of epistemic goods, and the epistemic character of relying on others). As I hope to show, his works are ripe for epistemological analysis and development!

## The Goals of Spiritual Formation

Cassian's fundamental assumption is that the spiritual life, like any other art or discipline, has its own method of enquiry, principles, and goals (*Conf.* 14.1.2, in Cassian 1997; see also 1.2.1–3). So, if one desires to 'grasp' or study the spiritual life, one must carefully attend to 'its own order and method of instruction' and to 'the precepts and institutes of the most accomplished teachers in that area of work or knowledge' (*Conf.* 18.2.1; see also 18.3.1–2). To put it in contemporary terms, the crucial warrant here seems to be a principle of epistemic fit. That is, we should fit our epistemic evaluations in an appropriate way to the subject matter under investigation.

Along these methodological lines, a penultimate goal of spiritual formation is the cultivation of a pure heart. The term 'heart' (*cor*), for Cassian, is synonymous with 'mind' (*mens*). However, Cassian does not provide a single (or precise) definition of purity of heart. Rather, it functions as an inclusive and multifaceted concept that refers to a stable, tranquil, and properly disposed mind (*Conf.* 1.5.4; 1.7.4; 1.15.1; 7.6.3; 9.2.1; 9.6.5; 19.6.5; 19.11.1). Understood in this way, purity of heart has a volitional dimension insofar as it involves scrutinizing and freeing one from improper desires and redirecting them towards 'spiritual things' (*Conf.* 1.22.2; 10.7.3). However, purity of heart is not merely volitional in nature. It also has an epistemic dimension in that it plays a crucial role in developing a positive orientation towards cognitive states such as illumination, contemplation, and the vision of God, as well as fostering a steady pursuit of them. Although deep immersion in spiritual practices (e.g. fasting, vigils, the solitary life, meditation, reading scripture) aid in cultivating an inner stability of this sort, they are not the ultimate goal or end. Instead, they are 'tools of perfection' that are taken up for the sake of acquiring a pure heart (*Conf.* 1.7.2–3; 1.10.1).

However, purity of heart is not to be pursued for its own sake but for the sake of acquiring a greater epistemic state, namely, the kingdom of heaven in which God will be perceived and 'grasped by a pure vision' (*Conf.* 1.15.3; see also 1.8.2–3; 14.2). Consequently, the quest for the vision of God is at the heart of Cassian's account of the spiritual life; it is the ultimate goal towards which the pure in heart seek to make progress ('blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God', Mt. 5:8). All the same, the point here is not necessarily to 'defer beatitude to the afterlife' but to get a 'glimpse', however brief, limited, and tentative, of 'heaven on earth' (Harmless 2004: 389; see also Stewart 1998: 47). In other words, spiritual perception is progressive and multifaceted. In a helpful but more limited sense, one may perceive God in and through nature or in and through the acts of spiritual exemplars (*Conf.* 1.8.3; 1.15.1; 14.1.2). In another but more ultimate sense, one ascends from nature or spiritual exemplars to 'the vision of God alone' and feeds on 'the beauty and knowledge of God alone' (*Conf.* 1.7.2–3; 1.8.3). In terms of perceiving God, Cassian's distinction here may be comparable to Alston's distinction between indirect and direct perception. The former seems to mean that subject S perceives God by virtue of perceiving something else (e.g. nature; exemplars) and the latter means that God is 'directly presented or immediately present' to S (Alston 1991: 21).

What Cassian seems to be saying here is that the antecedent formation of a properly oriented and stable mind is indispensable to making progress towards the ultimate goal—the beatific vision. So, any possibility of making progress towards and acquiring the relevant epistemic goods of spiritual formation depends on the 'character of our life and the purity of our heart' (*Conf.* 1.15.3). Formally speaking, the claim here seems to be that subject S has a pure heart insofar as S is positively orientated towards (or loves rightly) the relevant epistemic goods. This comes down to clarifying epistemically what in fact S identifies with and for what or whom S has a deep and abiding desire (on the notion of a positive orientation towards epistemic goods, see Baehr 2011: esp. Ch. 6).

The pursuit and attainment of these goals involves ongoing participation in the practical as well as the contemplative aspects of the spiritual life. The former precedes and enables the latter. Understood in this way, the process of spiritual formation involves moving from 'practical activity to the contemplation of divine things in perpetual purity of heart' (*Conf.* 1.10.4). The practical life largely focuses on understanding the nature of the vices and on the best way to rectify them. It also seeks to understand the nature of the virtues, how they are to be properly ordered, and how they best fit together in light of one another with a particular goal in mind (e.g. purity of heart). The result is the formation of a virtuous mind that delights in the good for its own sake (*Conf.* 14.1.2; 14.3.1). The other aspect of the spiritual life consists in the 'contemplation of divine things and in the understanding of most sacred meanings' (*Conf.* 14.1.2). It includes, for example, reflecting on the acts of spiritual exemplars, perceiving God in and through nature, and understanding the 'most sacred meanings of scripture' (e.g. '[when] the veil of the passions has been lifted, the eyes of the heart will naturally contemplate the mysteries' of scripture'; *Inst.* 5.34). However, its ultimate stage consists of 'feeding on the beauty and knowledge of God alone' (*Conf.* 1.8.3; on the continuum of the contemplative life, see Stewart 1998: 48–52). Although they are connected in terms of mapping the spiritual life and of achieving the relevant goals, the distinctive roles of the practical and contemplative aspects of spiritual formation are not to be blurred. One can have the former without the latter, but not vice versa. For example, one can acquire a better understanding of the practical aspects of the spiritual life without necessarily acquiring contemplative knowledge of divine things (e.g. 'simple and unified contemplation' of God; *Conf.* 1.8.3).

## Relying on Others

A very important epistemic feature of living and learning about the spiritual life involves relying on others. The focus here is on the social conditions under which humans depend on structures, practices, and exemplars in their quest for truth, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom concerning the spiritual life. More specifically, it is in and through the relationship with the spiritual director that the inquirer learns how to render apt judgements about the relevant issues at hand and how to map the various stages of the spiritual life. Within this setting, experienced and recognized masters of spirituality serve as the 'bridge' between the novice and 'spiritual enlightenment' (Demacopoulos 2007: 114; see also Rich 2007: 115; Rousseau 2010: 19–20; and *Conf.* 19.11.1). The title 'spiritual director' ('guide'; 'elder'; 'Abba') refers to one that has greater experiential knowledge of and insight into the spiritual life. Thus, acquiring these epistemic goods involves constant and humble submission of one's thoughts and desires to the judgement and evaluation of spiritual directors. The assumption here is that one's insights alone are insufficient for gauging one's progress and for properly deciphering the course of the spiritual life (Goodrich 2007: 48). Instead, spiritual formation has an intersubjective process of evaluation. The work of discerning one's thoughts and claims, of mapping the spiritual life, of knowing how to acquire the relevant epistemic goods must be brought out in public and evaluated by spiritual authorities (*Conf.* 2.10.1–2; see also 2.11; 16.11.1). This social process of evaluation provides a safeguard against trusting or relying solely on one's own judgement or understanding.

Along these lines, Cassian focuses on the person-specific and social factors under which people learn how to form a 'virtuous mind' and to make progress towards achieving the goals of the spiritual life (*Inst.* Preface 5; 4.9; 5.6.1, in Cassian 2000; *Conf.* 18.1.3). In the *Conferences*, for example, he employs the literary form of conversation between students and masters of spirituality as a way to pass on ascetic wisdom concerning the process and goals of spiritual formation. Some of the topics include purity of heart, discernment, the relationship between the practical and contemplative aspects of the spiritual life, and the beatific vision. With this in mind, Cassian sees himself as a reliable transmitter and interpreter of ascetic knowledge and wisdom, especially in terms of providing 'maps of the spiritual life' (Stewart 1998: 40; see also Leech 2001: 39; Goodrich 2007: 118). In the introduction of the translation of the *Conferences*, Boniface Ramsey says that the form of the *Conferences* 'may be reduced to the passing on of Christian ascetic wisdom from masters to disciples, and both masters and disciples are intended by Cassian to appear as models of their types' (Cassian 1997: 13, 16). The appeal here is to what the tradition, as represented by masters of spirituality, has said about the various stages of the spiritual life, not simply to personal judgement.

These spiritual directors possess the relevant knowledge and understanding of the art of forming Christians and of the best way to achieve the goals of spiritual formation, though not infallibly; they too need feedback from others to avoid appealing only to their own experience, judgement, or claim of self-knowledge. Nevertheless, they help identify (or 'wisely' notice) obstacles that 'the darkened sight of our mind does not grasp' (*Conf.* 23.6.2). The aim here is not only to acquire true beliefs about God (and avoid false ones; though these are important goals) but also to form people in such a way that are they are volitionally and intellectually open to God and are aptly prepared to make the relevant progress towards the ultimate end—perceptual knowledge of God. So Cassian is not merely interested in evaluating the logical status of beliefs, but also in evaluating the processes, practices, and qualities of the inquirer along the spiritual path.

## Indicators of Spiritual Authority

As we have seen, relying on sources of spiritual wisdom is crucial to the process of spiritual formation. However, not all claims of spiritual authority are necessarily trustworthy. In fact, there are some indicators that help determine whether a person is a reliable means for offering spiritual direction. I want to draw attention to three in Cassian's account of the spiritual life.

One indicator is the worthiness (or way of life) condition. In terms of this condition, Cassian operates with a basic distinction between those who have been properly trained by experienced and recognized guides of spirituality and those who appeal only to their personal judgement. More specifically, those that 'have shaped their lives in a praiseworthy and upright manner' and have embodied the 'imitable rigor of their chosen orientation' serve as a basis for determining 'what is more beneficial for making progress in the spiritual life' (*Conf*. 2.13.2–3; 17.2.1; 17.3). With this in mind, one should not offer spiritual direction without receiving the appropriate training and without growing in experiential knowledge concerning the spiritual life. Those trained under the system at hand had to master their own struggles and challenges before they were in a position to train and guide others. Thus, no one is chosen to exercise spiritual authority over a community before one has 'learned by obedience' what one ought to teach (or pass on to) those under one's spiritual authority (*Inst*. 2.3.3; see also *Conf*. 11.4.3; 14.18).

Although deferring to the wisdom of spiritual directors is important to the formation of these students, the goal is to acquire first-hand (experiential) knowledge concerning the contours of the spiritual life. In this sense, experience is a fundamental qualification of the spiritual guide. 'No one can understand the truth and power of this except the person who has perceived the things that are being spoken about with experience as his teacher—that is to say, if the Lord has turned the eyes of his heart away from all present things' (*Conf*. 3.7.4; see also 14.18). The point here seems to be that without the relevant first-hand knowledge one lacks the requisite epistemic insights concerning what it is like to live out the spiritual life. So, spiritual authority, in this sense, has a learned, lived, and transformative dimension. In taking up the relevant practices, instruction, and virtues, the spiritual director seeks to acquire experiential knowledge of the spiritual life and thus to provide the appropriate direction to others.

However, the point here is not to trump all learning with an appeal to experience or to a way of life. In fact, Cassian rejects the claim that experience (or longevity) alone necessarily recommends these authorities (see *Conf*. 2.13.2); nor does it ensure that they are reliable sources of spiritual wisdom, especially since not all appeals to experience are equally valid and sufficient for guiding people. For example, some may be misled by excessive zeal or they may lack the required discernment for rendering apt judgements concerning the employment of spiritual practices for a particular end. Cassian thus stipulates a second indicator: an appeal to experience (or way of life) must be coupled with and grounded in the teachings of the tradition (*Conf*. 2.15.3; 3.7.3; 12.12.1; 14.18). The claim of one director must be assessed in light of what the tradition has said or taught concerning the spiritual life (e.g. 'the ancient reflections and sayings of the fathers'; *Inst.* 1.2.2; *Conf.* 1.23.1; 2.15.3; 16.10). Appealing to the testimony of the tradition, then, is a key component for deciphering whether a person is a reliable means for offering direction.

However, appealing to one's way of life and to tradition is not enough. A person can have the relevant experience and various pieces of information from the tradition but lack the capacity to make salient connections. Consequently, Cassian provides a third indicator. Those who aid in mapping the process of spiritual formation and of achieving the relevant goals must have discernment (*discretio*). As a gift of grace, discernment is a regulatory intellectual virtue that is foundational to the process of mapping the spiritual life. Cassian claims that it is supreme and primary among all the virtues. This stems especially from the fact that discernment is 'the source and root of all the virtues' and 'the begetter, guardian, and moderator of all virtues', and thus 'no virtue can either be perfectly attained or endure without' it (*Conf.* 2.4.4; 2.9.1; 1.23.1).

I want to draw attention to two features of discernment that have some epistemological bearing on the process of mapping the stages of spiritual formation and of acquiring the relevant goods. First, the proper exercise of discernment includes a kind of acquired spiritual perception. In this regard, the relevant practices and background beliefs play a crucial role in training up a person to render fine-grained judgements concerning the spiritual life. The aim of these practices and beliefs is to foster the kind of epistemic stability and training that is needed for perceiving and assessing correctly the thoughts and desires of the inquirer. Accordingly, a mature agent of discernment, 'fortified by true judgment and knowledge', perceives rightly, 'casts light on all a person's thoughts and actions', and wisely determines what must be done to remedy the situation at hand (*Conf.* 2.2.5–6). In a sense, people are learning to become better spiritual perceivers through spiritual direction.

Second, discernment regulates the formation and employment of the virtues (and related practices) and aptly deciphers a proper fit between the capacity of the inquirer and the various stages of the spiritual life. The *Conferences* are replete with examples of when the exercise of a virtue is fitting or excessive in relation to the situation at hand. More specifically, discernment helps determine how these practices and virtues fit together in light of one another and how they best contribute to the acquisition of the penultimate and ultimate epistemic goals of spiritual formation. As a result, a person of discernment rightly assesses proposals concerning the spiritual life and determines the best way for forming a 'steady ascent to God' (*Conf.* 2.2.3–4). In this sense, one needs to discern the value and purpose of spiritual virtues and practices for cultivating purity of heart and for making progress towards experiencing the vision of God (Rich 2007: 81, 86, 88). Engaging in spiritual practices is clearly an important part of spiritual formation. Yet discernment is needed to determine how these practices are to be exercised properly and how they best contribute to acquiring the relevant goals. Some, for example, say the best route to spiritual perfection 'consists in pursuing fasts and vigils', while others see solitude as the best way. However, these proposals are bound to fail if they lack, or are not regulated properly by, discernment, especially since this intellectual virtue enables one to avoid excesses (e.g. inflexible rigour/abstinence, unreflective zeal, self-righteousness, uncritical claims to divine revelation/illumination) and 'teaches' one how rightly to 'proceed along the royal road' (*Conf.* 2.4.4).

Discernment, then, does not simply entail collecting various pieces of information or uncritically taking up all of the practices of the spiritual life. Rather, it is the ability to weigh properly all the relevant pieces of information and to render an apt judgement concerning the redirection of thoughts and the right course of action. Moreover, the community recognizes the cumulative nature of spiritual direction and evaluation. Each indicator alone is not sufficient for determining whether a person is a reliable means of spiritual direction and wisdom. Nevertheless, when these indicators are combined they help determine whether spiritual guides are reliable sources of spiritual formation.

## Concluding Remarks

This volume seeks to reconceive and address different theological topics in light of new developments in epistemology. Along these lines, recent work on the intersection of spirituality and philosophy is refreshing and is deeply relevant to the epistemology of theology. It creates space for attending more fully to the epistemological issues that crop up within the topic of spiritual formation. In particular, an important aspect of spiritual formation involves focusing on the social conditions under which people are formed in theological contexts as knowers and on the complex and inextricable relationship between the cultivation of the self and the pursuit of the relevant epistemic goods. As we have seen, deep immersion in (perhaps dependence on) a set of spiritual practices, materials, processes, and people is fundamental to the formation of spiritual knowers. This kind of emphasis resembles, though not uncritically, the early Christian integration of spiritual formation and the pursuit of the relevant epistemic goods.

The time is ripe for bringing to bear more explicitly and more constructively recent work in epistemology on the topic of spiritual formation. With this in mind, I want to spell out briefly three areas of enquiry that hold constructive promise for thinking about the intersection of epistemology and spiritual formation.

One fruitful area involves exploring and developing constructive connections between recent work in virtue epistemology and spiritual formation. In this regard, some work in virtue epistemology may help identify the relevant materials in the Christian tradition that stress the importance of transformation for the pursuit of knowledge of God. For example, some have offered accounts that give attention to the nature and internal structure of the intellectual virtues, clarify their particular role in the cognitive life or in epistemological enquiry, explain how they contribute to 'personal intellectual worth', and show how they create space for pursuing epistemic goods (see Kvanvig 1992; Roberts and Wood 2007; and Baehr 2011). One might likewise explore the question of how the cultivation of particular virtues (e.g. humility, discernment, purity of heart, love) contributes to the formation (or reintegration) of the self and how they thereby facilitate (or regulate) the pursuit of the relevant epistemic goods (see Aquino 2012). Though the process of spiritual formation clearly requires properly functioning faculties and processes (e.g. perception, reason, memory, and testimony) in a congenial environment, it also calls for the cultivation of virtues the exercise of which enables one to discern spiritual realities, map the proper course, grow in self-knowledge, and make progress towards the vision of God.

It might also be interesting to explore the question of whether particular virtues play an auxiliary or constitutive role in acquiring the relevant epistemic goods (for further reflection on the distinction between the auxiliary and constitutive roles of the virtues, see the recent discussion between Jason Baehr and Ernest Sosa in Sosa 2015: 62–74; and Baehr 2015: 74–87). For example, does purity of heart simply enable one (or put one in a position) to acquire perceptual knowledge of God? Or is it in and through the cultivation of a pure heart that one perceives God? One could explore the same kind of question concerning virtues such as attentiveness, watchfulness, dispassion, discernment, love, and humility. While some of the virtues may play an auxiliary role insofar as they put one in a good place to acquire the relevant epistemic goods, I wonder whether they all can be reduced to this kind of role. Greater clarification on a case-by-case basis is needed. Thus, it will take an analysis of the structure, aim, and role of each virtue to determine the relevant category into which each fits.

A second fruitful area concerns the nature of epistemic authority, especially in terms of the relationship between a spiritual director and the inquirer. As we have seen, relying on others is crucial to the process of spiritual formation. In this context, epistemic authority seems to be entrenched in a long-standing appeal to canonical practices, materials, processes, and people. However, it would be helpful to understand in what sense the spiritual director functions as an epistemic authority. Is the director's authority derivatively based upon some independent reasons (e.g. the inquirer has independent reasons to think that the director is reliable or in a better position to offer insights concerning the spiritual life)? Or is it the case that the inquirer accepts the word of the director independently of anything that he or she might know about the guide's abilities, track record, and so on? (On the distinction between derivative and fundamental authority and related questions, see Foley 1994; Zagzebski 2012.) Another feature of spiritual authority involves determining whether it is inextricably tied to expertise or whether it is grounded in people or institutional structures that do not necessarily have the requisite expertise. Moreover, what epistemic goods do they help members of the community acquire? Do they possess more knowledge, understanding, and wisdom concerning the spiritual life? Or are they more reliably suited to aid others in pursuing these epistemic goods? (For some works that unpack and address the epistemological issues at stake in the crisis of religious authority and connect epistemic authority with religious belief, see Stout 1981; Abraham 1998; Aquino 2004: esp. Ch. 4; and Zagzebski 2012 and 2016.)

A third fruitful area involves clarifying the nature and structure of spiritual perception in terms of the relationship between the director and the inquirer. As we have seen, a reliably formed spiritual director is able to perceive correctly the thoughts and desires of the inquirer and the relevant connections that are crucial to the process of spiritual development. This seems to be a kind of acquired spiritual perception that is conditioned by a robust set of virtuous and contemplative practices. Perception of this sort sheds light on any misunderstandings of the inquirer (e.g. the overestimation of a particular practice; self-deception) and thus brings about a more felicitous understanding of the situation at hand (e.g. the best practices and virtues for correcting the problem and thereby making progress towards the specified goal). Along these lines, a relevant inquiry would involve exploring whether spiritual direction is (or requires) a kind of skilled perception. If so, what significant practices and virtues contribute to this kind of perception? Is it possible to awaken, train, and cultivate perception of this sort? Is it more akin to something like birdwatching than ordinary perception?

In this chapter, I have drawn attention to some works that connect philosophy and the spiritual life. Also, I have unpacked and developed some important epistemological features of spiritual formation in the writings of Cassian. However, the aims and scope of the traditions of spiritual formation are diverse, and so we have only scratched the surface in terms of taking up all the relevant theological and epistemological issues. It is my hope that this chapter will provoke further reflection and development towards the constructive task at hand.

## Acknowledgements

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## Suggested Reading

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Baehr (2011).
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# PART II

# GENERAL EPISTEMIC CONCEPTS RELATED TO THEOLOGY

## CHAPTER 11

# UNDERSTANDING

JONATHAN L. KVANVIG

## INTRODUCTION

THOUGH widely recognized in ordinary life, understanding has not played a significant role in the history of epistemology. The primary reason for this omission is the prominence of the sceptic in the history of epistemology. One can legitimately say that the history of epistemology is dominated by discussions with real or imagined sceptics, with the result that the focus of the history of epistemology is on the nature and scope of human knowledge. This history, leading to a typical gloss on the subject matter of epistemology in terms of the theory of knowledge, is not strictly accurate to the etymology of the term 'episteme', which has as content something much closer to our contemporary notion of understanding than to knowledge (see Moravscik 1979; Burnyeat 1981; Lear 1988; and Benson 2000). The term signals a Greek interest in the intellectual good of being able to see or grasp how various aspects of the world are interrelated. Consider, for example, Plato's method of collection and division in the *Sophist* as providing a solution to the question of what *episteme* is in the *Theaetetus* (where the dialogue ends as the sun goes down with no explanation of the key notion of a *logos* to separate *episteme* from true belief). A proper application of the method involves collecting examples of the phenomenon in question, noting what they have in common, and then further sorting to turn what begins as a sufficient condition for the phenomenon into a larger set of conditions that is both necessary and sufficient. Such a process greatly exaggerates what is required for knowledge, but is much more plausible as an account of what is involved in (full) understanding (for details of the method and its role in Plato's dialogues, see Sayre 1969). This good of seeing how the various aspects of the world are interrelated is not something one can get simply by showing the sceptics that they are wrong to think that we do not know that here is one hand and here is another.

In the past decade or so, the place of understanding in a complete epistemology has become a more central topic of epistemological enquiry. One can begin to see the motivation for such attention by considering the possibility that understanding and knowledge are different epistemic goods, and by considering the plausible idea that understanding is a greater intellectual accomplishment than knowledge. By analogy with T. S. Eliot's lament in the opening stanza of *The Rock* (1934):

> Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
> Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

We can equally lament the lack of understanding while extolling the proliferation of information and knowledge. Recognizing the plausibility of doing so raises the possibility that understanding is an intellectual accomplishment that is both different from and superior to the primary focus of the history of epistemology. Nonetheless, it is an accomplishment within the domain of what epistemological enquiry is all about: it is an important kind of success regarding the connection between mind and world.

These remarks about the motivation for drawing attention to understanding in recent epistemology also provide a rubric under which to investigate the topic. Central to an adequate philosophical grasp of understanding is an understanding of its nature and types as well as its value. I turn first, then, to the nature and types of understanding, after which I will address axiological issues involved in understanding (much of what I write here borrows from my previous work on understanding, including Kvanvig 2003, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2012, 2013).

## The Nature and Types of Understanding

Understanding, like knowledge, comes in a variety of forms. There is understanding that something is the case—understanding who committed the murder, what weapon was used, where and when the murder occurred, and how all this came to be; and there is understanding that is directed at an object, whether a person, place, or thing (including abstract entities such as theories). So, an initial list of types of understanding needs to recognize objectual understanding, propositional understanding, and understanding-wh (which we take to include understanding-how). Each of these types of understanding mirrors a type of knowledge. There is propositional knowledge, objectual knowledge, and knowledge-wh. Schaffer (2007) investigates a further linguistic form of knowledge: knowing the answer. This form of knowledge attribution seems to have no analogue regarding understanding. To say that one understands the answer is vastly different from saying that one knows the answer: the former means not that one understands that the answer to a given question is such-and-such, but that one grasps the meaning of the sentence that gives the answer. This difference in linguistic form between knowledge and understanding has not been investigated in the literature, and it is not clear what to make of it (though it clearly confirms that the language of knowing and the language of understanding are not interchangeable). Because understanding and knowledge come in similar linguistic forms, a natural starting point for a theory of understanding would be to see to what extent understanding can be characterized in terms of knowledge. In many cases, the two seem interchangeable: understanding how to get to the airport seems to be the same thing as knowing how; knowing when to keep one's mouth shut seems to be the same thing as understanding when to do so; etc. Even when we are talking about understanding that something is the case, the interchangeability with knowledge seems plausible: understanding that people are angry with you seems in the same rough conceptual space as knowing that people are angry with you.

Significant overlap, however, is not identity, and there are good reasons to question whether understanding and knowledge can be identified. Understanding seems to involve conceptual and explanatory connections between various items of information that are seen or grasped by the person in question, whereas knowledge may not. Thus, one might know (by testimony) that arithmetic is incomplete, but not understand that it is incomplete (because one does not see or grasp what makes this be the case). Such a point generalizes to objectual understanding and knowledge as well. It is easy to imagine cases in which one claims to know a person but not understand that person at all. Once we begin to see such examples, they multiply. One can, for example, know the answer to a test question but not understand it.

Moreover, there is a general hierarchy of value that one ascends by moving from the level of true belief to the level of knowledge, and from the level of knowledge of isolated and perhaps unimportant pieces of information to the level of systematic understanding of a subject matter. One can know a lot of quantum theory and yet not have much by way of understanding of it; one can know indefinitely many things about the American political system and have little by way of understanding of it.

So there is a good case to be made that understanding need not be present in order for knowledge to be present. What of the other direction, however? Can one have understanding without knowledge, and more specifically, can there be understanding that is not explicable in terms of some body of knowledge or other?

There is an important, long-standing tradition according to which understanding involves knowledge of causes, as noted in Greco (2009): to understand combustion is to know why it occurs when it does; to understand the First World War is to know why it started, what led to the conflict, and why it ended as it did. So there is a prima facie case, at least, in favour of the idea that understanding is a species of knowledge.

This conclusion has been resisted in a number of ways. First, it has been argued that understanding, unlike knowledge, is not factive. Knowledge is typically assumed to be factive, in the sense that you cannot know something that is false (and when it is objectual knowledge that is under consideration, such as knowledge of jazz, the analogous requirement is that whatever informational components go into the knowledge in question must be true). Some argue that understanding is not factive (e.g. Zagzebski 2001; Elgin 2009; and Riggs 2009), and hence can be present in such a way that an explication in terms of knowledge is impossible.

This way of resisting the idea that understanding is a species of knowledge has its pitfalls, for it is simply false that the ordinary notion of knowledge is factive. If a person expresses surprise and regret the morning after previous US President George W. Bush's re-election victory over John Kerry by saying, 'Dang, I just knew Kerry won; that is why I went to bed and slept so well', they did not mis-speak. Such non-factive uses of 'know' and its linguistic variants are widespread and neither awkward nor inappropriate in any other way (for a recent defence of this claim, see Hazlett 2010). So the argument from factivity against the idea that understanding is a species of knowledge cannot rely solely on claims about the ordinary notion of knowledge or linguistic practices regarding 'knows'.

It is important to note that this failure of factivity is no mark against the standard epistemological assumption that knowledge is factive. Epistemology is the investigation of important kinds of successful connections between mind and world, and knowledge is a paradigm example of such. But in the non-factive uses of 'knows', there is no such success, since these uses convey only a certain kind of subjective certainty. As such, they no more involve a successful connection between mind and world than mere belief does. It is for this reason—the axiological source of epistemological inquiry—that knowledge is assumed to be factive: only such cases of knowledge involve *success* regarding the connection between mind and world.

I should hasten to point out that the notion of success that is relevant here does not require factivity for it to be present. All I am claiming is that, with respect to our ordinary notion of knowledge, there are two relevant categories, and only one of them involves the notion of success regarding the connection between mind and world. It is compatible with this claim that other, non-factive notions (such as reliable belief, justified belief, safe or sensitive belief) also involve an important kind of success regarding this connection, in spite of being non-factive. It is because the non-factive uses of 'knows' and its cognates involve mere psychology that they do not involve a relevant notion of success. It is not because they are non-factive.

The point to note here, then, is that any argument from factivity to a denial that understanding is a species of knowledge is going to have to be more complicated than merely citing some instance of understanding and arguing that it is not factive. Instead, the argument will have to go through the idea that there are instances of understanding that do not involve factivity and nonetheless involve success in the human endeavour to connect mind and world. The paradigm example of non-factivity that is irrelevant is when it is explicable in purely psychological terms, as we have just seen regarding non-factive uses of 'know'.

One might try out other psychological features, hoping to exploit them to show that, even if non-factive, understanding is a successful and important connection between mind and world. Linda Zagzebski argues for such features of understanding:

> Understanding, in contrast to [propositional knowledge], not only has internally accessible criteria, but is a state that is constituted by a state of conscious transparency. It may be possible to know without knowing one knows but it is impossible to understand without understanding one understands.
>
> (Zagzebski 2001: 246)

Zagzebski here points to two possible features. The first is the transparency of understanding and the second involves an analogue of the KK-Thesis. The KK-Thesis is the claim that you know that you know if you know, and is widely recognized to be false. The analogue of it that Zagzebski relies on may thus be called the UU-Thesis—that if you understand, then you understand that you understand. In addition, she seems to take these two points to be related: that it is because understanding is transparent that the UU-Thesis is true.

There are difficulties facing each of these claims. First, the linkage in question is suspect. For a psychological state to be transparent does not require that one is conscious of it and attending to it at every point of its existence. It only requires that if one turns one's attention to the question of whether one is in the state in question, it will be obvious to one that one is in such a state (and one will not be able to falsely believe regarding whether one is in that state). This understanding of transparency undermines the attempt to use it to secure the UU-Thesis. One of the reasons for rejecting the KK-Thesis is the cognitive overload objection: if the KK-Thesis were true, knowing one thing would require having an infinite number of beliefs, since knowledge requires belief. The same objection plagues the UU-Thesis: since understanding requires that one be in some psychological state, the UU-Thesis requires that one be in infinitely many such states. Notice that transparency, as just described, has no such implication. Thus, the UU-Thesis does not follow from the claim that understanding is transparent. And that is just as well, since the UU-Thesis faces many of the same problems that undermine the KK-Thesis.

But what of the transparency claim itself? Is it plausible that there is no distinction to be drawn between understanding and seeming to understand, between real understanding and putative understanding? I doubt there is any such notion of understanding or any cognitive state such as belief that is transparent in this way. Ever since Freud, we have been attuned to the possible opacity of mental states, to say nothing of the opacity of the world itself. Both points put pressure on the idea that understanding is transparent. First, if understanding is factive then it cannot be transparent, for the same reasons that factive knowledge is not transparent. Second, if understanding is not a factive notion but fundamentally a psychological one (perhaps with some epistemic dimensions such as rationality or justification included), the case for transparency is still undermined. For neither psychological states nor epistemic ones are plausibly thought to be transparent. It is one of the remarkable accomplishments in therapy to find out that one does not really believe some of the things that one has long thought that one believed, and it is surely as possible to have false beliefs about which of one's beliefs are justified or rational or warranted or reliable as it is to have false beliefs about any other aspect of the world.

It is also worth noting that there are reasons to resist the claim that there are important instances of understanding that are non-factive. On the factivity issue, the best location to look for failure of factivity is in the domain of scientific theories and models, but Kvanvig (2009b) argues that in such cases it is easy to confuse understanding of the theory or model with understanding of the phenomenon modelled. For example, there is the phenomenon of combustion and there are the phlogiston and oxygen models or theories of combustion. One cannot understand combustion itself while endorsing the details of phlogiston theory, but one can surely understand phlogiston theory itself while having lots of false beliefs about the nature of combustion. Kvanvig thus argues that objectual understanding is at least quasi-factive: while understanding of combustion can survive some false beliefs, so long as they are not too central to the phenomenon in question, one's understanding must involve information that is for the most part true, with the tolerance for falsity diminishing as we get to the more important and central truths about the phenomenon.

A different way to argue for the conclusion that understanding is not explicable in terms of knowledge is to point to a feature of knowledge other than truth and argue that understanding can be present even when this feature is absent. Both Kvanvig (2003) and Pritchard (2011; 2012) offer arguments of this sort. Kvanvig argues that objectual understanding can be present in the lucky way that is prohibited by the Gettier condition on knowledge, while Pritchard argues that understanding-why can survive one of two types of epistemic luck that knowledge cannot.

Kvanvig's principal example of objectual understanding involves understanding Comanche dominance of the southern plains of North America in the century from 1775–1875. The understanding is displayed in the person's ability to answer correctly any question about this phenomenon (drawing on the resources of stored information), but the stored information might have been acquired in a way riddled with epistemic luck of the sort that undermines knowledge. For example, the dates of important events might have been misprints in the books consulted and corrected by dyslexic interchange of digits by the person in question. In such cases, the appropriate attitude to take towards the person in question is that they are lucky to have the understanding that they have, not that they have no or little understanding of the phenomenon in question.

Some have argued that Kvanvig misdiagnoses these examples. Grimm (2006), for example, argues that every case of understanding-why is a species of knowledge-why. It is not clear, however, that such a result affects Kvanvig's point, since his point is about objectual understanding only. Others, such as Brogaard (2006), argue that the Comanche case crosses categories, so that when understanding is being considered, it is objectual understanding that is under consideration, but when knowledge is assessed, it is propositional knowledge that is denied. In such a case, an alternative explanation, other than claiming that understanding is not a species of knowledge, is that objectual knowledge (and objectual understanding) can be present even though much of one's propositional information is subject to epistemic luck. The cost of such a manoeuvre, however, is high: one will thereby be required to hold that one can have objectual knowledge of the Comanche dominance of the southern plains even though one has very little propositional knowledge about this dominance.

Pritchard distinguishes between Gettier-style epistemic luck (the sort that intervenes between belief and fact (as when one reasons through false premises to a true conclusion)) and environmental luck (of the sort involved in fake barn cases, where one happens to be looking at the only real barn in a land replete with fake barns, while believing that what one is seeing is a barn). He holds that understanding is compatible with environmental luck, but not with Gettier-style luck. So he thinks that some versions of the Comanche case are examples of understanding (say, when the books consulted are reliable sources but the library is filled with unreliable sources), but other cases—those involving Gettier-style luck—are not.

The issues involved in the question of the relationship between knowledge and understanding might become clearer if we focus more carefully on what is involved in paradigm instances of understanding. As noted above, central to the accomplishment of understanding are various coherence-like elements: to have understanding is to grasp explanatory and conceptual connections between various pieces of information involved in the subject matter in question. Such language involves a subjective element (the grasping or seeing of the connections in question) and a more objective, epistemic element. The more objective, epistemic element is precisely the kind of element identified by coherentists as central to the notion of epistemic justification or rationality as defended, for example, by Lehrer (1974), BonJour (1985), and Lycan (1988), who developed the coherentist agenda that was at its apogee in the middle part of the twentieth century in the work of Wilfrid Sellars, W. V. O. Quine, and Nelson Goodman (see Sellars 1963; Quine 1953; Goodman 1955). As coherentism has fallen out of favour in epistemology since its dominance in the middle part of the twentieth century (due primarily to the strong influence of the main, if not the only, prominent foundationalist of the time, Roderick Chisholm), the crucial role it plays in understanding might provide those inclined towards theories of justification that are either foundationalist or externalist in character a further reason for resisting the idea that understanding is a species of knowledge (for examples of externalisms that reject the internalist presupposition of the debates between foundationalists and coherentists, see Nozick 1981; Goldman 1986; Sosa 1991; and Plantinga 1993).

## The Value of Understanding

Besides the issues concerning the nature and types of understanding, there are also issues concerning the value of understanding. We can begin to see what these issues are by distinguishing two central value problems in terms of contrasts. For what I will call the general value problem, the contrast is between the presence and absence of a certain epistemic state. Thus, for knowledge, the first contrast is with ignorance, and the general value problem regarding knowledge can be raised in terms of the question of why knowledge is better than ignorance. This *better than* relation is defeasible, so that knowledge can be more valuable than ignorance even if there are some pieces of information that we legitimately prefer not to know. Stark examples of such are the intimate details of our parents' sex lives, of which nearly everyone would prefer to remain ignorant. The same point can be made about the general value of understanding. Understanding can be universally more valuable than its absence even though there are some things we are better off not understanding. A quick trip to a torture museum, for example, convinces one that the world would be a better place if there were less understanding of the variety of ways of inflicting pain.

It is worth noting that the general value question can be raised for other epistemic conditions as well: why is justified belief better than unjustified belief? Why, with respect to cognition, is reliability preferable to unreliability? Why is responsible belief formation more valuable than irresponsible belief formation? And so on. One should not expect uniform answers to such questions. For example, when dealing with factive states such as knowledge, one ready answer to the question of why knowledge or understanding (assuming that it is factive as well) is valuable is in terms of the practical value of such. If one knows which direction the stock market will go over the next twelve months, one will be able to invest more effectively; and if one understands fully the operations of a combustion engine, one will be better at repairing one when it malfunctions and in maintaining it to prevent such malfunction. Yet, for non-factive epistemic states such as justified, responsible, or reliable belief, the connection to practical benefits is less obvious, and, if present at all, the connection will have to be finessed very carefully to be accurate. For example, suppose all of your beliefs about the stock market's direction for the next twelve months are both justified and false. If so, your investments are unlikely to do better than chance, and there is no compelling reason to think you will be better off after a year than some other investor all of whose relevant beliefs are unjustified. Since our concern here is with understanding, however, we can ignore the interesting issues that arise regarding other epistemic goods to focus on understanding itself. If, contrary to what I suggested above, understanding is non-factive, these concerns about the general value of non-factive epistemic goods would be pressing. If, however, the case for non-factivity is weak, as suggested above, we have at least one good answer to the question of why it is better to have understanding than to lack it: one's practical prospects are thereby improved.

Besides the general value problem, there are comparative issues that I will discuss under the label 'special value problems'. For example, asking about the special value of knowledge requires comparisons with other intellectually valuable states or properties—states or properties which (we presuppose) have general value, states or properties which are preferable to their absence. One typical contrast that arises here is between a state and its subparts. So, when the focus is on knowledge, we can ask with Socrates and Meno why one should prefer knowledge to true opinion. We might also pursue the question of which epistemic successes are most important by contrasting knowledge with rationality, justification, or warrant; and one might contrast knowledge with understanding and wisdom as well. All of these count as special value problems, and a full account of the value of a given epistemic good will explain both its general value and provide an explanation of its ranking within the total class of epistemic goods.

One particular special value problem for knowledge leads directly to an investigation of the value of understanding. Kvanvig (2003) argues that, contrary to what the history of epistemology presupposes as well as contrary to ordinary, commonplace assumptions, one particular special value problem cannot be solved for knowledge: knowledge is not more valuable than collections of its subparts. The argument begins by showing that knowledge is more valuable than true belief alone, and that justification (or whatever other normative feature one wishes to insert in place of justification) is preferable to its absence. But, as we have learned from Gettier (1963), knowledge is more than normatively appropriate true belief, and so to show that knowledge is more valuable than any combination of proper subparts, we would have to be able to show that unGettiered normatively appropriate true belief is preferable to Gettiered normatively appropriate true belief. Kvanvig examines the variety of approaches to the Gettier problem, and argues that, in each case, the better they get at avoiding counterexamples, the worse they are in terms of resources for solving this special value problem. Thus, there are good grounds for doubting that knowledge is preferable to any proper subset of its parts.

Kvanvig then argues that objectual understanding shares no such defect, in virtue of being immune to Gettier worries (as shown by the Comanche case and related examples). If Kvanvig is right, then understanding has at least one feature that makes it preferable to knowledge.

There are two concerns, however, with this direction of argumentation. The first arises from the literature canvassed above on the nature of understanding. This literature contains a variety of criticisms of Kvanvig's argument (see DePaul and Grimm 2007; Grimm 2006; and Pritchard 2009). Initial replies to these criticisms are contained in Kvanvig 2009b and 2009c, but the criticisms deserve a more complete response than has been given to this point. Even the most sympathetic criticism, as in Pritchard (2009), which allows that understanding is not a species of knowledge, still leaves understanding susceptible to some Gettierization, though not completely. If any of these criticisms can be sustained, this route to defending an advantage that understanding has over knowledge cannot succeed.

Equally important is a second consideration. Even if Kvanvig's argument succeeds, it does not fully address the special value problem concerning the relationship between knowledge and understanding. For all it purports to establish is that there is one respect in which understanding is preferable to knowledge, and that could be true while also true that there are other respects in which knowledge is preferable to understanding, thus leaving unanswered the question of which of these epistemic goods is better. So a more complete addressing of the relationship between the respective values of knowledge and understanding would still be needed, even if the argument succeeds.

With regard to this more all-encompassing special value problem, three approaches can be found in the current literature on understanding. A further approach arises in the context of Zagzebski's appeal to the transparency of understanding, and it is worth noting the plausibility of the value claims here, even though, as we have already seen, the appeal to transparency is problematic. As Zagzebski notes:

> Understanding is a state in which I am directly aware of the object of my understanding, and conscious transparency is a criterion for understanding. Those beleaguered by skeptical doubts can therefore be more confident of the trustworthiness of putative understanding states than virtually any other epistemic state.
>
> (Zagzebski 2001: 247)

Moreover, understanding would be valuable from a purely internal point of view. Whereas something can look like knowledge from the inside and yet fail to be knowledge, nothing can look like understanding from the inside and yet fail to be understanding (if the transparency thesis can be sustained).

So if understanding were transparent, it would have several advantages over knowledge; advantages that could be exploited to explain the special value of understanding over knowledge that Zagzebski's remarks reasonably presuppose. The difficulty is that understanding does not seem to be transparent. It is not a state about which one cannot be mistaken; it is not a state for which no appearance/reality distinction can be found. Hence, it cannot be included among the approaches that provide a response to the special value issue concerning the relationship between knowledge and understanding. For such approaches, we must look elsewhere.

Some approaches (e.g. Woodward 2003, and Grimm 2010) emphasize the way in which understanding involves a mirroring of modal dimensions of the world. For example, to understand a correct physical theory of the world will involve not only being able to see the relationship between the various values of the fundamental features of the world, but also to grasp or see how changes to these values would result in changes to other features of the world:

> [N]ote that when I merely take something like Newton's Second Law on the say-so of my teacher, then even though my mind will now be successfully mirroring the world—will be getting it right—the mirroring will nevertheless be quite superficial. More exactly, even though I will now be assenting to a proposition that contains accurate information about how the world works, my mind will nonetheless not actually be taking up or 'doing' that work. But what would it be like for my mind to reflect reality in that deeper way—to actually take up that work? … [I]t seems that what it needs to do is grasp the way in which the various elements (in this case, properties) described by the law depend upon one another—that is, to grasp how a change in the value of one of these elements will lead (or fail to lead) to a change in the value of the others. When that happens, the mind will mirror the world more profoundly than before because the mind will now 'take on' the nomological structure of the world, in the sense that the grasped structure will inform the mind in a way that it failed to do before, when one merely assented to the proposition.
>
> (Grimm 2012: 108–9)

One might think that this modal dimension of understanding might not be unique to it, for, as some have argued in recent years, knowledge itself might be a modal concept involving dimensions such as safety or sensitivity (for an useful survey of such positions, and a defence of a safety account, see Pritchard 2005). It is worth noting, however, that the modal dimension Grimm has in mind is more specific than any modal dimension knowledge involves, for the modal dimension involved in knowledge involves, at most, close worlds in which the content in question is true or false. It does not involve the deeper grasp of what exact difference would result from the myriad of specific ways a particular claim could be false. Hence, there may be a way to explain the special value of understanding over knowledge in terms of the former providing a deeper kind of mirroring of the world than is provided by knowledge.

A second approach claims that understanding is always an achievement whereas knowledge is not. Pritchard (2009 and 2010) argues against the claims made by some virtue epistemologists that knowledge is always an achievement. On this virtue view, knowledge is something for which a person deserves credit, and examples of this view can be found in Greco (2003: 123), Zagzebski (2003: 151), and Riggs (2002: 94). Pritchard borrows an example from Lackey (2007) to argue against this view:

> Having just arrived at the train station in Chicago, Morris wishes to obtain directions to the Sears Tower. He looks around, approaches the first adult passerby that he sees, and asks how to get to his desired destination. The passerby, who happens to be a Chicago resident who knows the city extraordinarily well, provides Morris with impeccable directions to the Sears Tower by telling him that it is located two blocks east of the train station. Morris unhesitatingly forms the corresponding true belief.
>
> (Pritchard 2009: 352)

Pritchard agrees with Lackey's assessment of this case—that 'though it is plausible to say that Morris acquired knowledge from the passer-by, there seems to be no substantive sense in which Morris deserves credit for holding the true belief that he does' (352). Hence, such knowledge is not an achievement on the part of the knower, though it may be an achievement on the part of the testifier.

Pritchard then argues that understanding is different. He holds that, whereas knowledge can be given to a person by a reliable testifier, understanding requires significant cognitive work of one's own, whether in the sense of overcoming obstacles to understanding or in terms of exercising significant cognitive abilities. As such, understanding requires that the achievement must be primarily attributable to the person who understands. Pritchard also maintains that achievement has final value—that it is worth pursuing for its own sake. Thus, if understanding is always an achievement, it is superior to knowledge in virtue of always and everywhere having final value.

A third approach is developed in Kvanvig (2013) that takes its cue from response-dependent approaches in ethics. Such response-dependent approaches attempt to explain moral concepts such as goodness or rightness in terms of human responses under certain circumstances. Perhaps, for example, goodness is to be understood in terms of being approved of under certain circumstances (see Johnston 1989; Lewis 1989; and Smith 1994), in terms of such approval being warranted (see McDowell 1985; Wiggins 1987; and McNaughton 1988). Other responses than approval might be used, and other properties than goodness might be targeted, and the generic character of a response-dependent account of some property $p$ of a given object or state $o$ involves, at a minimum, a biconditional: $o$ is $p$ iff $o$ is disposed to elicit, or warrants, response $r$ in circumstances $c$. Kvanvig argues that the phenomenon of curiosity and the 'aha!' experiences that legitimate closure of inquiry after purported understanding is achieved allows a response-dependent account of the final value of the target of curiosity. He claims that the drive or desire to understand is central to curiosity, and to cognition more generally, and that this motive is sated by putative understanding. By arguing that it is a pursuit of understanding rather than knowledge or true belief that is central to the phenomenon of curiosity, we get an account on which the response in question provides an explanation of the overall higher (final) value of understanding as compared with knowledge.

It should be noted that these three approaches are not in tension with each other, unless and until they are developed in such a way as to insist that one such feature is either fundamental or singular with respect to the value of understanding. If, for example, one were to claim that the fundamental explanation of the value of understanding must appeal to mirroring, such an approach would be in conflict with an approach that insisted that the fundamental explanation must be response-dependent. Or, if one insisted that response-dependence exhausts the value of understanding over the value of knowledge, such an approach would imply that achievement and mirroring play no role at all in explaining the special value of understanding over knowledge. Since none of the approaches make such claims, there is reason to think of them as complementary rather than conflicting. Moreover, the compatibility of these approaches turns the mind quite naturally to the prospect that there are other ways in which one might argue for the superiority of understanding over knowledge. Given how recent the interest in the nature and value of understanding is, it would be reasonable to suspect that we have not yet seen the full array of features on which to compare the value of understanding with the value of other important epistemological goods.

Whatever conclusions we come to about the nature and value of understanding, they will have implications for theological reflection. Recognizing the central importance of understanding in an adequate epistemology immediately forces a more holistic approach to such reflection, in contrast to a more atomistic effect of inquiry aimed at knowledge. Moreover, a focus on understanding leads to a conception of inquiry that is more in line with coherentist conceptions of reasoning and defending one's perspective, in contrast with the more linear picture portrayed by typical versions of foundationalism.

Such effects would result in an approach to theological enquiry that focuses more on systematic explanations of the target of inquiry than on specific arguments and refutations for and against various specific theses regarding that target. As a result, there could be no such thing as adequate theological reflection that remains uninformed by the advances made in science and other disciplines. It is often pointed out that good theology overlaps considerably with good philosophy, and once we enlarge the scope of epistemic goods in recognition of the superior value of objectual understanding, theology becomes even more demanding. Such a vision brings to mind a time when the most learned among us were the esteemed doctors of theology, and for those of us who value theological reflection there is comfort found in the connection between a focus on understanding in epistemology and such a vision.

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## CHAPTER 12

# WISDOM IN THEOLOGY

### STEPHEN R. GRIMM

*Blessed is the man who finds wisdom,*
*the man who gains understanding,*
*for she is more profitable than silver*
*and yields better returns than gold.*
*She is more precious than rubies;*
*nothing you desire can compare with her.*
Proverbs 3:13–15

The love of wisdom is found not just in philosophy but also in virtually all of the great religious faiths. In the quote from the Hebrew Bible above we are told that wisdom is more precious than rubies, and in his letter to the Christian community in Colossae, St Paul says that he prays ceaselessly that they might be filled with knowledge of God's will 'in all spiritual wisdom and understanding' (Col. 1:9; for more on the significance of wisdom in Eastern religions, see Brannigan 2000, and in Islam see Ferrari et al. 2011).

At the same time, the great faiths often show significant suspicion towards the idea of wisdom, especially in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. As Jeremiah warns the Israelites,

> Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom … but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord.
>
> (Jer. 9:23–4)

And St Paul similarly writes to the Corinthians:

> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.
>
> (1 Cor. 1:19–20)

Rather than being more precious than rubies, in these passages the desire for wisdom seems almost like a betrayal of God. It is cast as a pagan, perhaps peculiarly Greek, aspiration that somehow blinds people to what is really important—either acting with steadfast love and justice (Jeremiah) or proclaiming Christ crucified (St Paul).

In addition to this ambiguous attitude towards wisdom, some of the central Judaeo-Christian claims regarding wisdom are far from clear. For example, how can we square the traditional idea that God alone is wise (Rom. 16:27) with the idea that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7 and 9:10)? If it is true that fearing God helps to *make* one wise, then how is this compatible with God's (apparently) unique claim to wisdom?

The relationship between wisdom and moral goodness has also been contested, and in particular the question of whether it is possible to be wise and evil at the same time (Pinsent 2012a). According to some recent philosophers, the Devil himself (as described by Christian tradition) should be counted as wise, and our theory of wisdom should accommodate this fact (Whitcomb 2011). Others have claimed that to be wise you at least need to be morally good (Zagzebski 1996), with some claiming that true wisdom needs to be infused by God, and is inseparable from love (Pinsent 2012a; 2012b). These questions help to bring out the fact that wisdom is often thought to have a moral character that other epistemic goods lack. While it is certainly possible to have knowledge and yet fail to be good, and arguably to have understanding yet fail to be good, it is less obvious that one can be wise and fail to be good. We therefore need to explore why wisdom is often thought to differ from other epistemic goods in this way, and how exactly the relationship between wisdom and moral goodness should be conceived.

## Some Distinctions

To better understand wisdom's distinctive character, it will first help to distinguish between domain-specific forms of wisdom and wisdom conceived in a more general or holistic way. In a domain-specific sense, to say that someone is a wise mechanic or a wise detective or a wise political consultant is presumably to say that the person understands these various domains at a deep level and sees patterns or connections that other people fail to appreciate. A wise mechanic therefore has a deep understanding of how your car works and a wise political consultant of what motivates the electorate.

It is no contradiction, however, to say that while someone might be a wise political consultant, she is not wise in general, or that while someone might be a wise mechanic he is not *really* wise, or wise deep down. A wise mechanic, after all, might be an indifferent father and otherwise irresponsible—the sort of person you would turn to for advice about your car but whom you would not turn to for advice about life in general.

But what might it mean to be wise in this more general sense, or really wise, or wise deep down? Along with other philosophers such as Robert Nozick (1989) and Joel

Kupperman (2005), I have argued that a person who is wise in this more general sense is someone who knows how to live well (Grimm 2015). So understood, wisdom is a form of knowledge. Reflection on the concept also suggests that knowing how to live well is a complex state that can be broken down into the following distinct parts, all of which, it seems, are individually necessary for wisdom:

1. Knowledge of what is good or important for well-being
2. Knowledge of one's standing relative to what is good or important for well-being
3. Knowledge of a strategy for obtaining what is good or important for well-being

Later on we can ask whether these three conditions are not just individually necessary but also jointly sufficient—in particular, we can ask whether there is some sort of 'lived out' or existential condition on wisdom, over and above these cognitive or epistemic states. I will return to that question in this chapter's third section, but first I will try to say a little in favour of these different conditions.

The basic idea in favour of the first condition is that a wise person knows what is valuable or important for well-being and in particular knows what is *more* or *less* important for well-being. In Kupperman's words, the person has 'knowledge of what has high, low, or negative value' (Kupperman 2005: 250), both in general and especially in particular situations. For example: suppose two sisters have nursed grudges against one another for years, both thinking it is more important to maintain their pride than to relent and apologize. The dispute thus simmers on and there is little peace in the family. Suppose eventually sister A comes to think that clinging to her pride is not worth it, and that the well-being of the family is more important. She has a change of heart, and comes to think her old priorities were misguided. Sister B, however, continues to dig in her heels.

If you think that sister A's new attitude is wiser and sister B's foolish, then I take it this is because you think that A now has a more accurate judgement about what is 'really important' in life. Put another way, the moral seems to be that if we think someone has *mis*placed priorities—valuing pride over peace, or work over relationships, and so on—then this lack of appreciation for what really matters seems to take them out of the running for wisdom. So it appears that having accurate judgements about what is valuable or important for well-being is a necessary condition for wisdom, in accord with point number 1.

It does not seem sufficient for wisdom, however. Suppose I accurately believe that having good friendships is important to well-being, but I mistakenly think that I have a number of good friends, unaware that my selfish behaviour has been eroding these relationships for years. Then, far from being wise, I would begin to seem like a paradigm instance of a fool. What this suggests is that the wise person not only needs to know what is good or important for well-being, but also where she stands relative to what is good or important. In other words, she needs a certain amount of self-awareness or self-understanding, the sort of self-awareness reflected in the Delphic admonition to 'know thyself'. One might know what is good, but unless one knows how far away one is from what is good one cannot effectively try to seek it out.

This brings us to our third condition. For the wise person is someone who not only knows what is good or important for well-being and where she stands relative to what is good or important, but she also seems to know effective strategies for achieving what is good or important. An alleged sage who knew that, say, tranquillity was crucial to well-being *and* knew that he was very far from tranquillity, but nevertheless did not have any clue about how to achieve it would not strike us as very wise.

To count as wise, a person therefore needs to possess some techniques or strategies for bringing about good ends. That is not to say, however, that these strategies are always very specific. For example, it is said in the Talmud that the wise man is 'he who learns from all people' (Tractate Avot, 4.1). Interpreted as a strategy, we can take this to mean that the wise person is open to learning from others how to bring about good ends. This would, as it were, be a meta-strategy for learning effective first-order strategies for bringing about good ends. The third condition on wisdom also allows us to acknowledge one of the ways in which wisdom comes in degrees. For one mark of growing wisdom is the ability to deal with a widening range of unexpected challenges and hardships, the more extreme of which will call for more creative approaches.

With this in mind, it is worth considering how figures renowned for their wisdom would fare on such an account. Would Socrates, for example, still qualify as wise? At first glance it would seem so, for even though he did not take himself to be wise as the gods were wise, he at least took himself to be wise in virtue of knowing (a) that one of the most important things in life was to achieve knowledge of the true nature of things like goodness, justice, and beauty; (b) that neither he nor his fellow Athenians actually possessed this knowledge; and (c) that an effective way to try to achieve this knowledge was through dialectic or debate.

The account would also not count as wise people who fail to appreciate 'what is really important' or 'what really matters' in life—and again, this looks like an intuitively desirable result. As a basic framework, it therefore seems like a promising place to start.

## CLARIFICATIONS

This account is indeterminate in at least two different ways, however: first, because it is silent about exactly whose well-being is at issue (or perhaps better, *what sort* of well-being is at issue); second, because it fails to specify what actually *is* important for the requisite sort of well-being. Although I have appealed to a few different examples of 'important' things so far—things such as a good friendships or a peaceful family—I have not offered a theory about what exactly is important for well-being, or about what is more or less important, or about what is most important.

I take this indeterminacy to be a virtue of the theory for three reasons. First, it allows us to talk and theorize about wisdom without ourselves being wise (a relief!). Put another way, what the view is claiming is simply that our judgements about wisdom track our judgements about whether we think someone knows what is good or important for well-being. It is therefore a thesis about the shape of our concepts *wise* and *wisdom*, about what guides our judgements about what falls into the extension and what does not, rather than a fully articulated view about, as it were, the metaphysics of wisdom. Just as reliabilist theories in epistemology hold that reliability is necessary for knowledge but leave it up to others to determine which cognitive processes actually *are* reliable, so too my claim is simply that knowledge of things like 'what is good or important for well-being' is necessary for wisdom. For our purposes here, we can therefore leave as open the question of what actually *is* good or important for well-being, and to spell out effective strategies for achieving those goods.

A second asset of the theory is that it allows us to make sense of historical disputes about the nature of wisdom, both among philosophers and between philosophers and (non-philosophical) advocates of different religious traditions. If I am right, the correct way to interpret St Paul's disapproval of 'the wisdom of the wise' is not to suppose that he had no time for wisdom, or that he thought it was a purely pagan category of no interest to Christians, but rather that those alleged to be wise by the pagans were not really wise at all because they failed to appreciate what was truly important for living well.

A third virtue of the theory is that it helps us to understand the scriptural claim that 'God alone is wise' (Rom. 16:27). According to this view, the way it makes sense to say that God alone is wise is if one conceives of the relevant sort of well-being on a very grand scale, indeed the grandest scale possible, so that it is the well-being of the universe at issue.

But there are other sorts of well-being a person might have in mind, such as:

- one's own well-being
- the well-being of one's group
- the well-being of the human community
- the well-being of the human community, now and into the future
- and so on …

Is our concept of wisdom, then, so flexible or open-ended that any of these ways of filling out the relevant sort of well-being might count as legitimate? It does not seem so. For instance, the notion of a 'self-centred' wise person—that is, a wise person concerned only with his or her own well-being, to the neglect of the whole—seems like an oxymoron. The wise person therefore appears to be naturally concerned with the good or well-being of his or her larger community. And not just the present community, it seems, because one who was prepared to mortgage the well-being of future generations in order narrowly to benefit one's own would likewise not strike us as wise.

Since the wise person appears naturally concerned with the good of the whole, and since the 'logic of wisdom', as it were, seems to push the relevant circles of concern towards larger and larger groups, it is therefore no surprise that God alone would count as wise on some renderings, for only God could possibly bring about the well-being of the universe as a whole. Our concept of wisdom nevertheless seems flexible enough to count certain human beings as wise so long as they are likewise concerned with the good, on the widest scale available to them. When we say that human beings are wise, we must therefore have more tractable scales of well-being in mind.

## ‘Lived-out’ Wisdom

The claim so far is that the wise person needs to satisfy the three conditions noted above. One natural concern about this view is that it threatens to make wisdom overly epistemic or overly cognitive. Surely the wise person does not simply know how to live well, but actually *does* live well. So it would appear that, in addition to the three conditions mentioned, we need to add something else—something along the lines of an application condition, in the sense that the wise person not only knows what is important for well-being and has effective strategies for achieving this, but actually applies them to her life.

Although I think that some kind of application condition is in fact needed for wisdom, Dennis Whitcomb has recently challenged it on the basis of two different examples. Consider first his case involving Mephistopheles (or the Devil):

> Consider Mephistopheles, that devil to whom Faust foolishly sells his soul. Mephistopheles knows what advice will bring Faust to lead a bad life, and that is precisely the advice that he gives him. But then, it stands to reason that Mephistopheles also knows what advice will bring Faust to lead a *good* life. So, it stands to reason that Mephistopheles knows how to live well. Despite this knowledge, the life Mephistopheles lives is bad, and so is the life he brings Faust to live. Mephistopheles is sinister, fiendish, and wicked. But whatever he is, he is not a fool. He is, it seems, wise but evil.
>
> (Whitcomb 2011: 97–8)

To begin with, we can note that Whitcomb’s argument for thinking that Mephistopheles is wise seems misguided. Surely one can be able to offer advice for how to do something badly (play poker, raise children, write philosophy papers) without being able to offer advice on how to do it well. That said, we can agree with Whitcomb that there is genuine pressure to think of the Devil as wise—or, at least, we can agree that many people would ‘intuitively’ count the Devil as wise. How, then, should we make sense of this example?

One option would be to side with Jason Baehr (MS) and say the reason why many might be tempted to think of the Devil as wise is because he is in fact extraordinarily clever or cunning, and there is a natural but mistaken inclination to equate cleverness with wisdom. While I think there is something to Baehr’s point, I also think we can speak more directly to the apparent wisdom of the Devil by making a distinction between someone who is ‘really’ or genuinely wise and somehow who is, as it were, ‘wise in the ways of men’.

To be wise in the ways of men is to be expert in human psychology; that is to say, it is to have a thorough understanding of human desires, fears, foibles, and vanities. Someone who is wise in the ways of men is therefore an expert manipulator: he knows what makes human beings tick and is able to exploit this for his own gain. He is therefore like other shrewd but morally misguided figures such as Machiavelli or (to use a fictional example) Tywin Lannister from *Game of Thrones*—all people who are wise in the ways of men, but (it seems) mistaken about what is really important, and hence not really or genuinely wise.

In this way of looking at things, the Devil would not count as wise; not because he fails to 'live out' his knowledge of what it best or most important for well-being, but because (we can suppose) he has false beliefs about what is best or most important for well-being: he mistakenly thinks it better to rule in Hell than to serve in Heaven, for example. He therefore fails (at least!) the first condition on wisdom described above.

Whitcomb's second example appeals to the case of the 'depressed sage', as follows:

> Consider a wise person who knows how to live well and values and desires the good life. Suppose that at some point in this person's life, he is beset by a fit of deep depression due to a medication he had to take to cure an otherwise terminal illness. It seems unfair to this person to say that his medication destroys his wisdom. Isn't his depression bad enough on its own? Can't his doctor rightly avoid mentioning wisdom loss when discussing the medicine's risks?
>
> Our unfortunate medicine-taker could still retain all of his knowledge, including all of his knowledge of how to live well. People might still go to him for good advice; and with poking and prodding, they might even get it. He might even be a stereotypical wise sage, sitting on a mountain and extolling deep aphorisms. Should his visitors feel slighted because he is deeply depressed? Should they think that they have not found a wise man after all, despite the man's knowledge and good advice?
>
> (Whitcomb 2011: 97)

As Whitcomb reports, he certainly would not think that. Instead, if he came across such a person, he would 'take his advice to heart, wish him a return to health, and leave the continuing search for sages to his less grateful advisees' (Whitcomb 2011: 97). In short, if Whitcomb is right, then someone might be wise and yet fail to live well because of a condition such as deep depression.

In evaluating this case it helps to recall that the wise person seems naturally concerned not just with her own well-being but also with the well-being of her community. She knows not just what it takes for her to live well or flourish but also what it takes for that community or group to live well or flourish. In the case as described by Whitcomb, it is far from clear whether his sage does in fact apply or live out his knowledge. After all, Whitcomb's sage dispenses advice, advice that presumably helps others to live well, and helps the community to flourish. If his sage knew that he could contribute to the well-being of others by dispensing advice and yet failed to do it, then I think our inclination to regard him as wise would diminish still further. What is more, the depressed wise person would presumably attempt to get help for her depression—in this way too applying her strategies for living well (Ryan 2012: 105). To the extent that she made no effort to live out her knowledge of the good at all, along with Ryan I think too that we would fail to regard her as wise.

It is therefore not clear that Whitcomb has produced a case where knowledge alone—regardless of conduct—is enough to count someone as wise. In addition to knowing how to live well (in the sense of having the three elements of knowledge described above), it therefore looks like the person needs to be able to *apply* this knowledge in some way (cf. Kekes 1983: 281; Nozick 1989: 269; Ryan 2013: Section 3). Alternatively, it looks like we need to require that the person 'take up' the knowledge in the right way and live it out.

Perhaps the most obvious way to acknowledge the importance of the lived dimension of wisdom is simply to tack it on to the epistemic or cognitive dimension. So we might say (roughly) that the wise person is someone who knows how to live well *and* whose actions are guided by that knowledge. Or perhaps we could add, by way of elaboration, that the wise person not only *knows* what is most important for well-being, but *loves* what is most important, to account for the apparent fact that in the wise person the cognitive and affective dimension are integrated or lined up in the right way. As Linda Zagzebski claims, 'Wisdom not only unifies the knowledge of the wise person but unifies her desires and values as well. There is nothing incoherent or even surprising about a wise person who is immoral, but it is at least surprising, perhaps incoherent, to say that a wise person is immoral' (Zagzebski 1996: 23).

While that is one way to go, in the remainder of this section it is worth considering another approach, one that essentially denies that *akrasia* (or weakness of will) with respect to wisdom is possible. This would be the view that when one *really* knows what is good or important for well-being and how to achieve those goods, one necessarily acts accordingly. Apparent cases of *akrasia* are therefore also only apparent cases of knowledge—not real or genuine cases of knowledge.

We can try to clarify this view by appealing to one of the central passages from Kierkegaard's *Sickness unto Death*:

> To understand and to understand: are these then two different things? Certainly .... [A] person stands there and says the right thing—and so has understood it—and then when he acts he does the wrong thing—and so shows that he has not understood it.... Ah! When one sees someone protesting complete understanding of how Christ went about in the form of a lowly servant, poor, despised, mocked, and as the Scriptures say 'spitted upon'—when I see that same person taking so many pains to seek refuge in the place where in worldliness it is good to be, setting himself up as securely as possible, when I see him so anxiously awaiting—as if his life depended on it—every unfavorable breath of wind from right or left, so blissful, so utterly blissful, so jubilant, yes, to round it off, so jubilant that he even emotionally thanks God for it—for being honored and respected by everyone, everywhere; then I have often said to myself, 'Socrates, Socrates, how could it be possible for this person to have understood what he claims to have understood?'
>
> (Kierkegaard 2010: 304–5)

Although Kierkegaard (putting aside issues of pseudonymity) speaks here of understanding, we can reasonably substitute the term 'knowledge' (and its variants: 'know', 'known', etc.) throughout this passage without much loss. Equally, we could have substituted the term 'understanding' throughout our original account of wisdom without much loss: thus the wise person would understand how to live well, understand what is good or important for well-being, and so on. The idea would then be that there are two states the word 'know' might pick out: on the one hand, the state of being disposed to assent to a true proposition, to sincerely affirm it as true on reflection, and so on, but (crucially) where the disposition to otherwise act on the belief is lacking. On the other hand, 'know' might pick out a state where these dispositions to assent are combined with a disposition to act in accordance with one's assent. Call the first state *weak knowledge* and the second state *strong knowledge*. If Kierkegaard is right, and supposing the truth of the proposition, one might therefore 'accept' that it is best to imitate Jesus whenever possible—and hence weakly know it—even while one might fail to strongly know this because the (apparent) belief fails to make a difference in one's actions. If one knew in a strong sense that it was best to imitate Jesus whenever possible—if one *really* knew it, as it were—then one's actions would necessarily be informed by this knowledge.

One way to try to salvage our original tripartite account of wisdom would then be to claim that the sort of knowledge needed for wisdom is strong knowledge—knowledge that goes beyond a mere disposition to assent and that necessarily informs one's actions. While this approach is appealing, my own inclination is to deny that the weak sense of 'knows' picks out a state that deserves to be called knowledge at all: in this view, one does not even 'weakly' know the propositions that one is alleged to know because belief is a necessary ingredient in knowledge (interestingly, Schwitzgebel and Myers-Schulz 2013 resist this step), and one does not even believe these propositions.

To illustrate the point briefly, consider the case of the racist college professor described in Schwitzgebel:

> Many Caucasians in academia profess that all races are of equal intelligence. Juliet, let's suppose, is one such person, a Caucasian-American philosophy professor.... She is prepared to argue coherently, sincerely, and vehemently for equality of intelligence and has argued the point repeatedly in the past .... And yet Juliet is systematically racist in most of her spontaneous reactions, her unguarded behavior, and her judgments about particular cases. When she gazes out on class the first day of each term, she can't help but think that some students look brighter than others—and to her, the black students never look bright .... When Juliet is on the hiring committee for a new office manager, it won't seem to her that the black applicants are the most intellectually capable, even if they are; or if she does become convinced of the intelligence of a black applicant, it will have taken more evidence than if the applicant had been white. When she converses with a custodian or cashier, she expects less wit if the person is black. And so on.
>
> (Schwitzgebel 2010: 532)

According to Schwitzgebel, what cases along these lines help to show is that there is a difference between being disposed to judge that certain propositions are true and actually believing them—and that while Juliet is disposed to judge that all races are equal, she doesn't actually believe this, because all of her actions belie this judgement. As he nicely observes, 'If the aim of attributing belief is to say something about how we steer through the world, then judgment cannot be sufficient for belief' (Schwitzgebel 2010: 548).

Schwitzgebel, then, would not want to attribute belief to Juliet, only judgement—that is, only a disposition to assent to the truth of some claim, without the tendency to have that assent guide her actions. And similarly he would presumably say with the case of Kierkegaard's church-going self-aggrandizer, that this person too simply judges or assents to the fact that it is best to act like Jesus but does not really believe that it is best. What he *really* believes is that it is best to gain worldly respect, or to promote his own welfare wherever possible.

Returning again to our analysis of wisdom, the idea would be that someone who merely claims (judges, assents) that something is best or most important but fails to act accordingly does not really know it, because knowledge requires belief, and she does not in fact believe it. In this view it would therefore be impossible to know that something is the best or most important thing to do without having this knowledge guide one's actions. Hence a separate application condition would be unnecessary or redundant.

The point to emphasize, in any case, is that wisdom seems to require an integration of thought, desire, and action, so that the person who claims that something is best or important but then fails to live in accordance with that judgement does not seem wise. I have briefly suggested that the state of knowledge can do this integrating work, but if one thinks otherwise then it will be necessary to stipulate that wisdom requires knowledge *plus* action. I will not try to resolve that issue here, but simply flag that where one stands on this issue will determine whether the tripartite account above requires supplementation.

## Wisdom of the Cross

I will close by asking about the nature of wisdom in Christianity, and in particular in the writings of St Paul. Perhaps the central text is from his letter to the Corinthians, quoted in part earlier:

> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart'. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made

> foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.
>
> ...
>
> [God] is the source of your life in Jesus Christ, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'.
>
> (1 Cor: 17–31)

This passage is very rich, needless to say. What does it teach us about Christian views on wisdom?

First, consider Paul's remarks about 'human wisdom', or the wisdom of the world. If our earlier analysis of wisdom was on target, all claims to wisdom are implicitly claims to know what is good or important for well-being. The Greeks of course—the paradigm of human wisdom for St Paul—disagreed among themselves about what constituted well-being, but they seemed to agree that virtue was centrally involved in living well, and that what it took to be virtuous could be determined by philosophical debate or reflection. For Aristotle at least, it was also clear that the person who was living well was prominent in the city, and recognized as great by those around him.

According to Paul, Jesus's life turned these Greek notions on their heads. To live well was to live in accordance with God's will, and living in accordance with God's will could require great, indeed crushing, sacrifice. Thus it was Jesus on the cross 'who became for us wisdom from God'; that is, the new picture of what it means to live well or to flourish. But of course the idea that someone nailed to the cross could be living well or doing well is crazy—foolishness—in the eyes of the world. There is thus no philosophical argument that can be made for this way of living, no way to persuade people with 'plausible words of wisdom' (1 Cor. 2:4). The fact that Jesus on the cross is a picture of the best sort of life could only be demonstrated by God's power, and especially by the Christian belief that God raised Jesus from the dead.

This Christian vision also seems to have consequences for the way in which wisdom—real, genuine wisdom, in the Christian view—is acquired. For according to the world, one acquires wisdom through experience—by living through different possibilities and gaining a better sense of how these different possibilities contribute to well-being. But if St Paul is right, no amount of ordinary human experience could make it plausible that suffering, or poverty, or being despised by the world, is a good thing. It therefore seems to require what Aquinas calls a special 'gift' of the Holy Spirit to acquire this sort of wisdom, or to recognize that the best sort of life is a life where worldly consolations might be sorely lacking (for more on Aquinas and the gift of wisdom, see Pinsent 2012b). Considered as a type of knowledge, true wisdom would therefore plausibly be knowledge acquired in an extraordinary way.

## CONCLUSION

I should say a word about how the remarks about wisdom here bear on the traditional distinction between practical and theoretical wisdom. For it might be thought that this entire discussion has been too one-sided and partial—the focus has been so exclusively on the practical side of wisdom, or on knowing how to live well, that the theoretical side of wisdom has been unduly neglected.

There are ways, however, even on the 'practical' account of wisdom sketched here, in which theoretical knowledge can have an important role to play. For one thing, it might be thought that part of what is involved in living well is exercising one's highest capacities, and in particular one's capacity for acquiring scientific or metaphysical knowledge. In that case the wise person would be especially concerned with acquiring the sort of deep understanding of what the world is like that is often categorized as 'theoretical' wisdom. (For more on deep understanding, see Aquino 2012. In my view, having a deep insight into how various fields fit together or 'grasping relevant connections' (Aquino 2012: 85) is more characteristic of understanding than wisdom. The key to wisdom, I think, is the axiological dimension, where one appreciates which things are better or more important than others.) For another, there are many views in which living well requires being in harmony with nature, or with the universe, or with God's will. But in that case, living well will apparently be abetted by knowing what nature is really like, or what God is really like: in other words, living well will be abetted by just the sort of deep physical or metaphysical knowledge that has traditionally been categorized as theoretical wisdom.

If the account offered here is correct, however, this sort of knowledge merits the title 'wisdom' only because it is importantly related to the goal of living well. And living well, according to the Christian vision in particular, might require something quite different to what common sense would suggest.

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# CHAPTER 13

# THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TESTIMONY AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

JENNIFER LACKEY

Testimony is an ineliminable epistemic source. We rely on the reports of others for our knowledge of the food we eat, the medicine we ingest, the geography of the world, discoveries in science, historical information, and many other areas that play crucial roles in both our practical and our intellectual lives. Even much of our knowledge about ourselves was learned at an earlier time from our parents and caretakers, such as the date of our birth, the identity of our parents, our ethnic backgrounds, and so on. Were we to refrain from accepting the testimony of others, our lives would be impoverished in startling and debilitating ways.

## Testimony and Testimony-Based Knowledge

The central focus in the epistemology of testimony is not on the nature of testimony itself, but instead on how justified belief or knowledge is acquired on the basis of what other people tell us. Because of this, those interested in the epistemology of testimony often embrace a very broad notion of what it is to testify; one that leaves the distinction between reliable and unreliable (or otherwise epistemically good and bad) testimony for epistemology to delineate (for a narrow view that builds the epistemology of testimony directly into its nature, see Coady 1992; for views of the nature of testimony with other types of restrictions, see Ross 1986 and Graham 1997). So, for instance, Elizabeth Fricker holds that the domain of testimony that is of epistemological interest is that of 'tellings generally' with 'no restrictions either on subject matter, or on the speaker's epistemic relation to it' (Fricker 1995: 396–7). Similarly, Robert Audi claims that in accounting for testimonial knowledge and justification we must understand testimony as '… people's telling us things' (Audi 1997: 406). And Ernest Sosa embraces '… a broad sense of testimony that counts posthumous publications as examples…. [It] requires only that it be a statement of someone's thoughts or beliefs, which they might direct to the world at large and to no one in particular' (Sosa 1991: 219).

Despite the virtues of these broad conceptions of what it is to testify, however, there is reason to think that they are too broad. In particular, there is a difference between entirely *non-informational expressions of thought* and *testimony*. For instance, suppose that we are walking down the street and I say, 'Ah, it is indeed a lovely day'. Suppose further that such a statement, though it expresses my thought that it is indeed a lovely day, is neither offered nor taken as conveying information; it is simply conversational filler, comparable to a sigh of contentedness. In such a case, it is doubtful that the statement in question should qualify as testimony, despite the fact that it is a 'telling' or expression of thought. Otherwise put, the concept of testimony is intimately connected with the notion of conveying information, and thus those statements that function, for instance, as mere conversational fillers should fail to qualify as instances of testimony. A more precise account of the nature of testimony, then, should be formulated as a speaker's making an act of communication—which includes statements, nods, pointing, and so on—that is intended to convey the information that *p* or is taken as conveying the information that *p*. To this end, I propose that 'S testifies that *p* by making an act of communication *a* if and only if (in part) in virtue of *a*'s communicable content: (1) S reasonably intends to convey the information that *p*, or (2) *a* is reasonably taken as conveying the information that *p*' (Lackey 2008: 30; for a full development of this view, see Lackey 2006 and 2008).

Moreover, clearly not everything we learn from the testimony of others qualifies as being *testimonially based*. For instance, suppose I say that ten people have spoken in this room today and you, having counted the previous nine, come to know that ten people have spoken in this room today (this type of example is found in Sosa 1991). Here, my statement may certainly be causally relevant with respect to your forming this belief, but your knowledge is based on your having heard and counted the speakers in the room today, thereby rendering it perceptual in nature. Or suppose that I sing 'I have a soprano voice' in a soprano voice and you come to know this entirely on the basis of hearing my soprano voice (this is a variation of an example found in Audi 1997). Again, the resulting knowledge is perceptual in nature since it is based on your hearing my soprano voice rather than on what I testified to. What is of import for distinctively testimonial justification or knowledge is that a hearer forms a given belief *on the basis of the content of a speaker's testimony*. This precludes cases such as those above—where a belief is formed entirely on the basis of features *about* the speaker's testimony—from qualifying as instances of *testimonial* justification or knowledge.

There are also intermediate cases in which a hearer has relevant background information and uses it to derive knowledge from the statement of a speaker. For example, suppose that you know from past experience that I report that there is no coffee in the carafe only when there is some. Now when I report to you that there is no coffee in the carafe, you may supplement my testimony with your background information and hence derive knowledge that there is coffee in the carafe. Because the epistemic status of beliefs formed in these types of cases relies so heavily on memory and inference, the resulting justification and knowledge are only partially testimonially based. Hence, such beliefs typically fall outside the scope of theories purporting to capture only those beliefs that are entirely based on testimony.

## Testimonial Knowledge: Transmission versus Generation

Does testimony generate new knowledge in its own right, or does it merely transmit across people knowledge that has been generated by more basic sources, such as sense perception? This is a central question in the epistemology of testimony, and the standard view is that testimony, like memory, is not a generative epistemic source. While memory is said to only *preserve* knowledge from one time to another, testimony is thought to merely *transmit* knowledge from speaker to hearer. In particular, there are two main theses to this Transmission View (TV) of testimony; one is a necessity claim and the other is a sufficiency claim. More precisely:

> TV-N: For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, B knows that *p* on the basis of A's testimony that *p* only if A knows that *p*.
>
> (Proponents of the necessity thesis include Welbourne 1979, 1981, 1986, and 1994; Hardwig 1985 and 1991; Ross 1986; Burge 1993 and 1997; Plantinga 1993; McDowell 1994; Williamson 1996 and 2000; Audi 1997, 1998, and 2006; Owens 2000 and 2006; Reynolds 2002; Schmitt 2006; and Faulkner 2007.)

> TV-S: For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, if (1) A knows that *p*, (2) B comes to believe that *p* on the basis of the content of A's testimony that *p*, and (3) B has no undefeated defeaters for believing that *p*, then B knows that *p*.
>
> (Proponents of different versions of the sufficiency thesis include Austin 1979; Welbourne 1979; 1981, 1986, and 1994; Evans 1982; Fricker 1987; Coady 1992; McDowell 1994; Adler 1996 and 2006; and Owens 2000 and 2006. Burge 1993; Williamson 1996 and 2000; and Audi 1997 endorse qualified versions of this thesis.)

For instance, just as I cannot now know that *p* on the basis of memory unless I non-memorially knew that *p* at an earlier time, the thought underlying the TV-N is that I cannot know that *p* on the basis of your testimony unless you know that *p*. Similarly, just as my knowing that *p* at an earlier time is sufficient, in the absence of current undefeated defeaters, for me to now know that *p* on the basis of memory, the TV-S holds that your knowing that *p* is sufficient, in the absence of undefeated defeaters, for me to know that *p* on the basis of your testimony.

There are two kinds of defeaters that are standardly taken to be relevant to the satisfaction of condition (3) in TV-S. First, there are what we might call *psychological defeaters*. A psychological defeater is a doubt or belief that is had by S, but which indicates that S's belief that *p* is either false or unreliably formed or sustained. Defeaters in this sense function by virtue of being *had* by S, regardless of their truth value or epistemic status (for various views of psychological defeaters, see BonJour 1980, 1985; Nozick 1981; Goldman 1986; Pollock 1986; Plantinga 1993; Bergmann 1997, 2004; Lackey 1999, 2006, 2008; and Reed 2006). Second, there are *normative defeaters*. A normative defeater is a doubt or belief that S *ought* to have, but which indicates that S's belief that *p* is either false or unreliably formed or sustained. Defeaters in this sense function by virtue of being doubts or beliefs that S *should have* (whether or not S does have them) given the presence of certain available evidence (for various views of normative defeaters, see BonJour 1980, 1985; Goldman 1986; Fricker 1987, 1994; Chisholm 1989; Burge 1993, 1997; McDowell 1994; Audi 1997, 1998; Williams 1999; Lackey 1999, 2006, 2008; BonJour and Sosa 2003; Hawthorne 2004; and Reed 2006). The motivation for both psychological and normative defeaters is that certain kinds of doubts and beliefs—either that a subject has or should have—contribute epistemically unacceptable *irrationality* to doxastic systems and, accordingly, defeat the justification possessed by the target beliefs in question. Moreover, a defeater may itself be either defeated or undefeated. When one has a defeater for one's belief that *p* that is not itself defeated, one has what is called an *undefeated defeater* for one's belief that *p*. It is the presence of undefeated defeaters, not merely of defeaters, that is incompatible with testimonial justification.

While there is much intuitive support for the Transmission View, there are also objections that have been raised to both of its claims. Against the necessity claim, cases have been presented where a speaker fails to believe, and hence know, a proposition to which she is testifying, but she nevertheless reliably conveys the information in question through her testimony. So, for instance, suppose that a devout creationist who does not believe in the truth of evolutionary theory nonetheless researches the topic extensively and on this basis constructs extremely reliable lecture notes from which she teaches her students. In such a case, the teacher seems able to reliably convey to her students that *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus*, thereby imparting knowledge to her students that she fails to possess herself. Against the sufficiency claim, cases have been presented where a hearer's belief fails to be an instance of knowledge even though the hearer has no relevant undefeated defeaters, the speaker from whom it was acquired has the knowledge in question, and the speaker testifies sincerely. For instance, suppose that a speaker in fact knows that there was a bald eagle in the park this morning because she saw one there, but she would have reported to her hearer that there was such an eagle even if there hadn't been one. In such a case the speaker's belief is an instance of knowledge, and yet because she is an unreliable testifier the belief that the hearer forms on the basis of her testimony is not. Both counterexamples show that the Transmission View is false (both types of cases are developed in more detail in Lackey 2006 and 2008).

One of the central conclusions that these considerations motivate is the replacement of the TV with conditions focusing on the *statements* of speakers rather than on their states of believing or knowing. More precisely, the TV may be replaced with the following *Statement View* of testimony (SV):

> SV: For every speaker, A, and hearer, B, B knows that *p* on the basis of A's testimony that *p* only if (1) A's statement that *p* is reliable or otherwise truth-conducive, (2) B comes to truly believe that *p* on the basis of the content of A's statement that *p*, and (3) B has no undefeated defeaters for believing that *p*.
>
> (For a detailed defence of the SV, see Lackey 2006 and 2008.)

Further conditions may be needed for a complete view of testimonial knowledge. But regardless of what is added to the SV, such a view avoids the problems afflicting the TV. For instance, despite the fact that the devout creationist in the above case does not possess the knowledge in question, her statement that *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus* is reliably connected with the truth via the extensive research that she did on evolutionary theory. So, though she fails the TV-N, she satisfies condition (1) of the SV, thereby enabling her students to acquire the knowledge in question. Conversely, despite the fact that the speaker in the second case above knows that there was a bald eagle in the park this morning, her statement that this is so is not reliably connected with the truth since she would have reported that there was such an eagle even if there had not been one. Thus, the hearer cannot acquire knowledge about the bald eagle on the basis of the speaker's testimony. The SV can, therefore, handle both types of counterexamples with ease.

Moreover, the SV reveals that testimony is not merely a transmissive epistemic source, as the TV assumes, but that it can instead generate epistemic features in its own right. In particular, hearers can acquire testimonial knowledge from speakers who do not possess the knowledge in question themselves. In this respect, then, testimony is on an epistemic par with sources traditionally considered more basic, such as sense perception and reason.

## NON-REDUCTIONISM AND REDUCTIONISM

Another question at the centre of work in the epistemology of testimony is how precisely hearers acquire justified beliefs from the testimony of speakers, where justification is here understood as being necessary and, when added to true belief, close to sufficient for knowledge. Traditionally, answers to this question have fallen into one of two camps: *non-reductionism* or *reductionism*. According to non-reductionists—whose historical roots are typically traced to the work of Thomas Reid—testimony is a *basic* source of justification, on an epistemic par with sense perception, memory, inference, and the like. Given this, non-reductionists maintain that, so as long as there are no undefeated defeaters of either the psychological or the normative variety, hearers may be justified in accepting what they are told merely on the basis of the testimony of speakers.

(Proponents of various versions of non-reductionism include Austin 1979; Welbourne 1979, 1981, 1986, and 1994; Evans 1982; Hardwig 1985 and 1991; Ross 1986; Coady 1992; Burge 1993 and 1997; Plantinga 1993; Webb 1993; Foley 1994; McDowell 1994; Strawson 1994; Williamson 1996 and 2000; Schmitt 1999; Insole 2000; Owens 2000 and 2006; Weiner 2003; and Goldberg 2006. Some phrase their view in terms of knowledge, others in terms of justification or entitlement, and still others in terms of warrant. Audi, 1997, 1998, and 2006, embraces a non-reductionist view of testimonial knowledge, but not of testimonial justification.)

In contrast to non-reductionism, reductionists—whose historical roots are standardly traced to the work of David Hume—maintain that, in addition to the absence of undefeated defeaters, hearers must also possess *non-testimonially based positive reasons* in order to be justified in accepting the testimony of speakers. These reasons are typically the result of induction: for instance, hearers observe a general conformity between reports and the corresponding facts and, with the assistance of memory and reason, they inductively infer that certain speakers, contexts, or types of reports are reliable sources of information. In this way, the justification of testimony is *reduced* to the justification for sense perception, memory, and inductive inference. (Proponents of different versions of reductionism include Hume 1977; Fricker 1987, 1994, 1995, and 2006; Adler 1994 and 2002; Lyons 1997; Lipton 1998; and Van Cleve 2006. Lehrer 2006 develops a qualified reductionist/non-reductionist view of testimonial justification or warrant.) Broadly speaking, there are two different versions of reductionism. According to *global reductionism*, the justification of *testimony as a source of belief* reduces to the justification for sense perception, memory, and inductive inference. Thus, in order to be justified in accepting the testimony of speakers, hearers must possess non-testimonially based positive reasons for believing that *testimony in general* is reliable. According to *local reductionism*, which is the more widely accepted of the two versions, the justification for *each instance of testimony* reduces to the justification for instances of sense perception, memory, and inductive inference. So, in order to be justified in accepting the testimony of speakers, hearers must have non-testimonially based positive reasons for accepting *the particular report in question*.

Objections have been raised to both non-reductionism and reductionism. The central problem raised against non-reductionism is that it is said to permit gullibility, epistemic irrationality, and intellectual irresponsibility (see, for instance, Fricker 1987, 1994, and 1995; Faulkner 2000 and 2002; and Lackey 2008). In particular, since hearers can acquire testimonially justified beliefs in the complete absence of any relevant positive reasons, randomly selected speakers, arbitrarily chosen postings on the Internet, and unidentified telemarketers can be trusted, so long as there is no negative evidence against such sources. Yet surely, the opponent of non-reductionism claims, accepting testimony in these kinds of cases is paradigmatic of epistemic vice.

Against reductionism, it is frequently argued that young children clearly acquire a great deal of knowledge from their parents and teachers and yet it is said to be doubtful that they possess—or even could possess—non-testimonially based positive reasons for accepting much of what they are told (see, for instance, Audi 1997. For a response to this objection, see Lackey 2005 and 2008). For instance, an eighteen-month-old baby may come to know that the stove is hot from the testimony of her mother, but it is unclear whether she has the cognitive sophistication to have reasons for believing her mother to be a reliable source of information, let alone for believing that testimony is generally reliable. Given this, reductionists—of both the global and the local varieties—may have difficulty explaining how such young subjects could acquire all of the testimonial knowledge they at least seem to possess.

There are also objections raised that are specific to each kind of reductionism. Against the global version, it is argued that in order to have non-testimonially based positive reasons that testimony is generally reliable, one would have to be exposed to a wide-ranging sample of reports. But, it is argued, most of us have been exposed only to a very limited range of reports from speakers in our native language in a handful of communities in our native country. This limited sample of reports provides only a fraction of what would be required to legitimately conclude that testimony is *generally* reliable. Moreover, with respect to many reports, such as those involving complex scientific, economic, or mathematical theories, most of us simply lack the conceptual machinery needed to properly check the reports against the facts. Global reductionism, then, is said to ultimately lead to scepticism about testimonial knowledge, at least for most epistemic agents.

Against the local version of reductionism, it is argued that most ordinary cognitive agents do not seem to have enough information to possess relevant positive reasons in all of those cases where testimonial knowledge appears present. In particular, it is argued that most cognitive agents frequently acquire testimonial knowledge from speakers about whom they know very little (see Webb 1993; Foley 1994; Strawson 1994; and Schmitt 1999. For a response to this objection, see Lackey 2008). For instance, upon arriving in Paris for the first time, I may receive accurate directions to the Louvre from the first passer-by I see. Most agree that such a transaction can result in my acquiring testimonial knowledge of the Louvre's whereabouts, despite the fact that my positive reasons for accepting the directions in question—if indeed I possess any—are scanty at best.

The direction that some recent work on testimony has taken is to avoid the problems afflicting non-reductionism and reductionism by developing qualified or hybrid versions of either of these views (see, e.g. Fricker 1995 and 2006; Faulkner 2000; Goldberg 2006 and 2008; and Lehrer 2006). For instance, in an effort to avoid the charges of gullibility and epistemic irresponsibility, some non-reductionists emphasize that hearers must be 'epistemically entitled' to rely on the testimony of speakers or that they need to 'monitor' incoming reports, even though such requirements do not quite amount to the full-blown need for non-testimonially based positive reasons embraced by reductionists (see Goldberg 2006 and 2008, respectively, for these qualifications to a non-reductionist view). And some reductionists, trying to account for the testimonial knowledge of both young children and those hearers who possess very little information about their relevant speakers, argue that positive reasons are not needed during either the 'developmental phase' of a person's life—when a subject is acquiring concepts and learning the language, relying in large part on her parents and teachers to guide the formation of her belief system—or when hearers are confronted with 'mundane testimony'—about, for instance, a speaker's name, what she had for breakfast, the time of day, and so on (see Fricker 1995 for these modifications to reductionism). According to this version of reductionism, then, while positive reasons remain a condition of testimonial justification, such a requirement applies only to hearers in the 'mature phase' of their life who are encountering 'non-mundane testimony'. Such qualified or hybrid versions of both non-reductionism and reductionism often encounter either variations of the very same problems that led to their development, or altogether new objections (see Insole 2000; Weiner 2003; and Lackey 2008).

Arguably, a more promising strategy for solving the problems afflicting non-reductionism and reductionism should, first, include a necessary condition requiring non-testimonially grounded positive reasons for testimonial justification. This avoids the charges of gullibility, epistemic irrationality, and intellectual irresponsibility facing the non-reductionist's view. Second, the demands of such a condition should be weakened so that merely some positive reasons, even about the type of speaker, or the kind of report, or the sort of context of utterance, are required. This avoids the objections facing the reductionist's position that young children cannot satisfy such a requirement and that beliefs formed on the basis of the testimony of those about whom we know very little cannot be justified. Third, additional conditions should be added for a complete account of testimonial justification, such as the need for the reliability of the speaker's statement found in the SV. This frees the positive reasons requirement from shouldering all of the justificatory burden for testimonial beliefs, thereby enabling the weakening of its content discussed above (for a detailed development of this strategy, see Lackey 2008).

## The Interpersonal View of Testimony

An alternative family of views has been growing in popularity in more recent work in the epistemology of testimony, one that provides a radically different answer to the question of how testimonial beliefs are justified. Though there are some points of disagreement among some of the members of this family, they are united in their commitment to at least three central theses. First, and perhaps most important, the *interpersonal relationship* between the two parties in a testimonial exchange should be a central focus of the epistemology of testimony. Second, and closely related, certain features of this interpersonal relationship—such as the speaker *offering her assurance* to the hearer that her testimony is true, or the speaker *inviting the hearer to trust her*—are (at least sometimes) actually *responsible for conferring epistemic value* on the testimonial beliefs acquired. Third, the epistemic justification provided by these features of a testimonial exchange is *non-evidential* in nature. For ease of discussion, I shall call the general conception of testimony characterized by these theses the *Interpersonal View of Testimony* (hereafter, the IVT; proponents of the IVT include Ross 1986; Hinchman 2005; Moran 2006; Faulkner 2007; and McMyler 2011).

One of the central motivations for the IVT is a perceived failure on the part of existing views of testimony—particularly those that regard a speaker's testimony that *p* as merely *evidence* for a hearer to believe that *p*—to adequately account for the import of the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the hearer in a testimonial exchange. For instance, in discussing such evidential views of testimonial justification, Edward Hinchman says:

> When you have evidence of a speaker's reliability you don't need to trust her: you can treat her speech act as a mere assertion and believe what she says on the basis of the evidence you have of its truth. You can ignore the fact that she's addressing you, inviting you. You can *treat her as a truth-gauge*.
>
> (Hinchman 2005: 580, emphasis added)

In a similar spirit, Richard Moran maintains that:

> if we are inclined to believe what the speaker says, but then learn that he is *not*, in fact, presenting his utterance as an assertion whose truth he stands behind, then what remains are *just words*, not a reason to believe anything.... [T]he utterance as [a] phenomenon loses the epistemic import we thought it had ....
>
> (Moran 2006: 283, second emphasis added)

According to proponents of the IVT, then, a significant aspect of true communication is missing when a speaker is treated as a mere truth gauge, offering nothing more than words.

In contrast, proponents of the IVT argue that speakers should be regarded as agents who enter into interpersonal relationships with their hearers. For instance, according to Moran's version of the IVT—the *Assurance View*—a speaker's testimony that *p* is understood as the speaker giving her *assurance* that *p* is true. Since assurance can be given only when it is freely presented as such, Moran claims that a speaker freely assumes responsibility for the truth of *p* when she asserts that *p*, thereby providing the hearer with an *additional* reason to believe that *p*, different in kind from anything given by evidence alone. In a similar spirit, Hinchman argues that there are two different ways of giving an epistemic entitlement:

> One way is by influencing the evidence available to you, perhaps by making an assertion or otherwise manifesting a belief, which still makes you epistemically responsible for the belief I want you to form. Another is by inviting you to trust me, thereby taking part of that responsibility onto my own shoulders.... When a speaker tells her hearer that *p* ... she acts on an intention to give him an entitlement to believe that *p* that derives not from evidence of the truth of '*p*' but from his mere understanding of the act she thereby performs.... [U]nlike acts of mere assertion, acts of telling give epistemic warrant directly.
>
> (Hinchman 2005: 563–4)

Now, whereas Moran claims that the assurance of truth that the speaker gives to the hearer is the non-evidential feature of their interpersonal relationship that confers epistemic value on testimonial beliefs, Hinchman's *Trust View* maintains that this feature is *the speaker's invitation to the hearer to trust her*.

There is, however, a central problem afflicting the IVT, which can be cast in terms of a dilemma. The first horn is that if the view in question is genuinely interpersonal, it is epistemologically impotent. To see this, notice that a natural question to ask the proponents of the IVT is what the precise connection is between *a speaker's giving a hearer assurance of the truth of her utterance* or *a speaker's inviting a hearer to trust her* and *the truth itself*. Otherwise put, what is the *epistemic* value of such interpersonal features? By way of answering this question, Moran says, 'the speaker, in presenting his utterance as an *assertion*, one with the force of *telling* the audience something, presents himself as *accountable* for the truth of what he says, and in doing so he offers a kind of guarantee for this truth' (Moran 2006: 283, emphasis in original). But even if a speaker explicitly offers her hearer a guarantee of the truth of her assertion, what does this actually have to do with the *truth itself*? For instance, consider a radically unreliable believer who consistently offers assertions to her hearers that she sincerely believes to be true but which are wholly disconnected from the truth. Since this speaker presents herself as accountable for the truth of what she says, Moran claims that the hearer in question is thereby provided with a guarantee of the truth of what she says. But what does this so-called guarantee amount to? Nearly every time the speaker offers an assertion to a hearer, it turns out to be false. In this way, she is what we might call a reliably unreliable testifier. Moreover, notice that the point brought out by this case is not merely that a speaker can give her assurance that *p* is true but be wrong on a particular occasion; rather, the point is that a speaker can repeatedly give her assurance that various propositions are true and yet consistently offer utterances that fail to be reliably connected with the truth in any way. A 'guarantee' of truth that nearly always turns out to be false, however, is a far cry from anything resembling a genuine guarantee. Thus, as it stands, the Assurance View, though genuinely interpersonal, is epistemologically impotent. For, in the absence of distinctively epistemic conditions placed on the testimonial exchange, a speaker can give assurance and thereby a justified belief to a hearer even when she shouldn't be able to (because, e.g. she is a radically unreliable testifier). If the Assurance View is going to be a genuine contender in the epistemology of testimony, however, it simply cannot float free from all that is epistemic.

Aware of the sort of problem afflicting the Assurance View, Hinchman adds the following crucial amendment to his Trust View:

> Trust is a source of epistemic warrant just when it is epistemically reasonable. Trust is epistemically reasonable when the thing trusted is worthy of the trust—*as long as there is no evidence available that it is untrustworthy*. Assuming satisfaction of this negative evidential condition …, when an epistemic faculty is trustworthy *by serving as a reliable guide to the truth*, it makes available an entitlement to believe what it tells you whose basis lies simply in the fact that you trust it.
>
> (Hinchman 2005: 578–9, emphasis added).

In order for the acceptance of an invitation to trust to confer epistemic justification directly on a testimonial belief acquired, then, the following two conditions must be satisfied:

(1) the speaker's testimony must serve as a reliable guide to the truth, and
(2) the hearer cannot have any relevant undefeated defeaters (i.e. 'evidence available' that the speaker trusted 'is untrustworthy') for accepting the invitation to trust the speaker.

Now, as should be clear, the addition of these two conditions puts the Trust View of testimony on the epistemological map. In particular, by virtue of placing epistemic conditions on both the speaker and the hearer in a testimonial exchange, the Trust View avoids the debilitating objection that it is simply impotent for the epistemology of testimony.

However, here is where the second horn of the dilemma afflicting the IVT emerges: if the IVT is not epistemologically impotent, then neither is it genuinely interpersonal. In other words, while it is true that the addition of conditions (1) and (2) above renders the Trust View a genuine contender in the epistemology of testimony, it does so at the cost of making trust itself *epistemically superfluous*. For the reason why it is no longer an utter mystery how justification could be conferred through the acceptance of an invitation to trust is because conditions (1) and (2) do all of the epistemic work. When a hearer acquires a justified belief that *p* from a speaker's telling her that *p*, this is explained through both the speaker's reliability as a testifier with respect to *p* and the hearer's rationality as a recipient of the testimony. In providing the *epistemic* explanation of the hearer's newly acquired justified belief, then, trust simply drops out of the picture. Once trust becomes epistemically superfluous, however, the Trust View ceases to even represent a version of the IVT. For the interpersonal relationship between the two parties in a testimonial exchange is not the central focus of the epistemology of testimony on such a view, nor are features of this interpersonal relationship responsible for conferring epistemic value on the testimonial beliefs acquired—the reliability of the speaker's testimony and the rationality of the hearer's acceptance of the testimony are doing all of the epistemic work.

The upshot of these considerations, then, is that there is a general dilemma confronting the proponent of the IVT: either the view of testimony in question is genuinely interpersonal but not epistemological, or it is genuinely epistemological but not interpersonal. Either way, the IVT fails to provide a compelling alternative to existing theories in the epistemology of testimony.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THEOLOGY

Challenges have been raised to the rationality of religious beliefs that specifically focus on their testimonial nature. The first of two such challenges is the Argument from Luck, which calls into question the rationality of many religious beliefs by appealing to the contingency involved in their formation. Philip Kitcher articulates the problem as follows:

> Most Christians have adopted their doctrines much as polytheists and the ancestor-worshipers have acquired theirs: through early teaching and socialization. Had the Christians been born among the aboriginal Australians, they would believe, in just the same ways, on just the same bases, and with just the same convictions, doctrines about Dreamtime instead of about the Resurrection. The symmetry is complete.... Given that they are all on a par, we should trust none of them.
>
> (Kitcher 2011: 26)

John Greco offers a more detailed version of the argument:

> Argument from Luck:
>
> 1. When one forms a true religious belief on the basis of testimony from within a tradition, it is just an accident (just a matter of luck) if one forms a true belief on the basis of this testimony rather than a false belief on the basis of different testimony ....
> 2. Knowledge cannot tolerate that sort of luck or accident.Therefore,
> 3. True religious belief based on testimony from within a tradition cannot count as knowledge.
>
> (Greco 2012: 28–9)

Premise (1) emphasizes that the focus of the argument is on religious beliefs formed via testimony and that the accidentality of birth highlighted in the passages from Kitcher transmits to whether such beliefs end up being true or false. Premise (2) states the widely accepted view that luck is incompatible with knowledge. And (3) is simply the sceptical conclusion that follows from (1) and (2): true religious beliefs based on testimony cannot amount to knowledge.

This sort of challenge is not new, and various responses have been offered in defence of religious belief. What I want to consider here, however, is a novel defence offered by Greco that is grounded in the epistemology of testimony. He writes:

> Regarding premise 1, we may deny that when one receives testimony from within a tradition it is 'just an accident' or 'just a matter of luck' that one forms a true belief on the basis of that testimony. On the contrary, if the transaction in question constitutes an instance of knowledge transmission, it is underwritten by a reliable transmission of reliable information. That is, the transaction will involve knowledge on the part of the speaker, derived ultimately from some original source of knowledge, and then a reliable transmission of knowledge from speaker to hearer.
>
> (Greco 2012: 42)

According to Greco, then, once the mechanics of the epistemology of testimony are appreciated, it becomes clear that the luck involved in one's birth does not prevent the acquisition of religious knowledge via testimony. In particular, if testimonial knowledge is understood in terms of *a reliable process of transmission* rather than through, say, inductive inference, then all that is needed is that the speaker herself has the knowledge in question and then reliably transmits it to the hearer (see Lackey 2008 for a discussion of different accounts of testimonial knowledge). And this process does not at all depend on it not being an accident that the subject ended up in one environment rather than another. Thus, Greco concludes that the Transmission View provides a quick and easy solution to the problem generated by the Argument from Luck.

However, the mere fact that a process—testimonial or otherwise—is reliable does not mean that it cannot be subject to knowledge-depriving luck. This can happen in two ways: a particular output can be accidentally true, or the acquisition and use of the reliable process can be lucky. The former is the more familiar of the two, and occurs in standard Gettier cases where a belief might be true and justified because it is 'underwritten' by a reliable belief-forming processes, but is nonetheless accidentally true (see Gettier 1963). For instance, I might form the true belief that there is a barn in the field through my reliable faculty of vision, but my belief might be only accidentally true because I just so happened to look at the only real barn surrounded by barn façades (see Goldman 1976).

The latter occurs when an agent ends up with the reliable process that she does purely because of luck. For instance, suppose that whatever news source I choose to rely on is likely to highly influence the beliefs that I form about current events. Suppose further that there are two news sources that offer wildly conflicting reports about current events, and I choose to rely on one of them over the other through flipping a coin. Finally, suppose that on this basis, I come to believe that the political party in office is thwarting attempts at healthcare reform. Even if the particular news source I end up with is itself a reliable one, the broad process by which I have come to rely on it is not. This is evidenced by the fact that there are nearby possible worlds in which the coin came up differently and I relied on another news source, thereby forming false beliefs about healthcare reform (see Reed 2000). Thus, there are good reasons to deny that I know that the party in office is thwarting attempts at healthcare reform, even if my belief is in fact produced by a highly reliable process.

What these considerations reveal is this: that a subject ends up with a reliable faculty might itself be the result of a process that is riddled with knowledge-depriving luck. And indeed, this seems to be precisely what proponents of the Argument from Luck have in mind. For each of us, it is argued, it is just a matter of luck that we ended up in the particular community we ended up in, and thus even if our parents and teachers are in fact reliable in their religious testimony, it is simply an accident that we were put in touch with it. Hence, it is concluded that our religious beliefs are also riddled with knowledge-depriving luck. Thus, the mere fact that a reliable process underwrites testimonial knowledge transmission does not guarantee that the transmitted beliefs are not lucky in an epistemically problematic way.

The second challenge to religious belief is the Argument from Authority. Many religious beliefs are grounded in the testimony of a source that is taken to be authoritative, such as the church or a religious leader. But one obvious concern that arises is how such beliefs are epistemically justified, particularly if deference is required when faced with such authorities.

In recent work, Linda Zagzebski takes up this issue directly, and argues that religious beliefs formed on the basis of the testimony of an authority can be epistemically rational, where '[w]hat is essential to authority is that it is a normative power that generates reasons for others to do or to believe something preemptively'. Modelling her conception of authority on Joseph Raz's view in the political domain (see Raz 1988), Zagzebski holds that a preemptive reason is 'a reason that replaces other reasons the subject has' (Zagzebski 2012: 102). What this means is that a subject should not treat the testimony of an authority as evidence to be weighed against or aggregated with other relevant evidence that she might have. Rather, she should let the authority 'stand in for [her] in [her] attempt to get the truth in that domain, and to adopt his belief' without deliberation (Zagzebski 2012: 105).

According to Zagzebski's view, authority understood in this sense can be justified in one of two different ways: by a subject conscientiously judging either that she is more likely to form a true belief and avoid a false belief, or that she is more likely to form a belief that survives her conscientious reflection if she believes what an authority believes than if she tries to figure out what to believe herself. Conscientious reflection is '[u]sing our faculties to the best of our ability in order to get the truth' (Zagzebski 2012: 48). This is not an externalist notion, where one can strive to be as conscientious as possible but still fall radically short. It is doing the best that one can epistemically, where this is grounded in natural trust that Zagzebski argues we all have in our own faculties—a trust that cannot be supported with a non-circular defence of the reliability of these faculties.

It is but a small step from here to the justification of beliefs formed on the basis of religious authority. For just as one might conscientiously judge that one is more likely to form a belief that survives conscientious reflection if one believes what an authority believes, one might also judge that this is so if one believes what a community believes. More precisely, Zagzebski accepts the following:

> Justification of Religious Authority Thesis: The authority of my religious community is justified for me by my conscientious judgment that if I engage in the community, following its practical directives and believing its teachings, the result will survive my conscientious self-reflection upon my total set of psychic states better than if I try to figure out what to do and believe in the relevant domain in a way that is independent of Us.
>
> (Zagzebski 2012: 201)

Thus, if one conscientiously judges that following the teachings of one's religious community is more likely to produce beliefs that will survive one's conscientious reflection than if one tried to determine what to believe alone, then one is justified in accepting the testimony of one's religious community preemptively. Let us call this the *Authority View* (AV) of the rationality of religious beliefs.

There are at least two central problems with the AV. The first and most obvious is that it provides all of the resources for rendering rational the beliefs of paradigmatically irrational communities, such as white supremacists, cults, and terrorists. Otherwise put, there is simply no way to ensure that religious beliefs turn out to be rationally held on the AV without also thereby letting in the rationality of these paradigmatically irrational beliefs. To see this, notice that it is surely possible for a member of a white supremacist group to conscientiously judge that if she believes the teachings of her group, the result will survive her conscientious reflection better than if she tries to figure out what to believe on her own. This is especially clear when the beliefs in one's doxastic framework that are relevant to one's conscientious judging are themselves shaped and guided by one's being part of the community in question. If a person has been raised among white supremacists, for instance, then it is quite natural for her to judge that she is more likely to form beliefs that survive conscientious reflection if she believes what her fellow white supremacists believe since it is the very beliefs of her community that provide the framework through which she is so conscientiously judging. Indeed, the more insular a community is, the more likely it is for beliefs of its members to survive conscientious reflection.

The second problem with the AV is that it fails to provide the resources for rationally rejecting an authority's testimony when what is offered is obviously false or otherwise outrageous. Suppose, for instance, that I conscientiously judge that the pastor of my church is an authority on moral matters and he testifies to me that women are morally inferior to men. According to the AV, this instance of testimony is not one piece of evidence to be weighed against all of the other relevant evidence I have about the moral capacities of men and women; instead, it replaces all of the evidence I have on the topic. It is thus fully rational for me to now believe that women are morally inferior to men, despite the massive amounts of compelling evidence I have to the contrary. But why should one person's testimony—even when it is from a recognized authority—swamp all of my other relevant evidence on the question, especially when the proffered report is clearly false?

These problems thus call into question whether there can be rational beliefs—religious or otherwise—grounded in authority, where authority is understood as grounded in preemptive reasons.

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## CHAPTER 14

# VIRTUE

## JASON BAEHR

INTELLECTUAL virtues are traits of personal character that aim at and facilitate the acquisition and transmission of knowledge and related epistemic goods. In a volume on the epistemology of theology, it is worth considering the following question: Which intellectual virtues aim at and facilitate knowledge of God? Put another way: When it comes theistic knowledge, which personal traits contribute to optimal epistemic functioning?

Many familiar intellectual virtues are relevant here. Without traits like attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, intellectual thoroughness, open-mindedness, and intellectual courage, one's epistemic perspective on the nature and existence of God is likely to be below par. In this chapter, I argue that *moral* humility (as distinct from *intellectual* humility) is also an intellectual virtue with respect to theistic knowledge. I begin with some brief remarks about the nature of intellectual virtues. Next, I sketch a personal orientation that I refer to as 'human pride'. Against this backdrop, I then develop an account of moral humility, exploring in some detail how it functions as an intellectual virtue in the realm of 'theistic enquiry' (by which I mean, roughly, an active and sustained attempt to get at the truth regarding the existence or nature of God). Finally, I consider and respond to an objection according to which, given certain other features of human psychology, moral humility may in fact be an intellectual *vice* in the relevant context.

## INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES

Why do traits like attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, intellectual thoroughness, and the like count as intellectual virtues? What exactly gives them this status? One plausible view held by many virtue epistemologists is that the traits in question are intellectual virtues because they are traits that we have good reason to think are helpful for reaching the truth (Montmarquet 1993; Baehr 2011). More precisely, they are traits that we have good reason to think are helpful for overcoming various *challenges* or *obstacles* to truth (Baehr 2011: 17–22).

Sometimes, getting to the truth is a relatively straightforward affair. If I wish to know what sorts of medium-sized physical objects populate my immediate surroundings, I need only open my eyes and look. However, reaching the truth about other matters can be more demanding. This includes much of the knowledge prized by human beings, including scientific, mathematical, historical, and philosophical knowledge. In these domains, obstacles to truth abound. Overcoming these obstacles often requires an exercise of virtues like intellectual carefulness, intellectual thoroughness, and intellectual perseverance. A similar point applies to some self-knowledge—for instance, knowledge of one's cognitive limitations or failures. Such knowledge can require intellectual honesty, open-mindedness, intellectual humility, or intellectual integrity (for more on these points, see Baehr 2011: Chs 2–4).

This characterization of intellectual virtues underscores the possibility that, if there are peculiar challenges or obstacles to reaching the truth within a given domain, the list or set of intellectual virtues proper to that domain might differ from the traits we ordinarily think of as intellectual virtues. My aim is to argue that precisely this point applies to the domain of theistic inquiry—that moral humility is an intellectual virtue in this context. As I explain in much greater detail in what follows, this is attributable to the role that moral humility plays in mitigating the negative epistemic effects of a state I refer to as 'human pride'.

Many virtue epistemologists have identified *intellectual* humility as an intellectual virtue (Zagzebski 1996; Roberts and Wood 2007). As I intend to show, however, moral humility differs significantly from intellectual humility. It is a *habitual or practiced attentiveness to and responsible acknowledgement of one's (broadly) moral limitations*. It is a matter of keeping these limitations in view and 'owning' (rather than denying, hiding, or justifying) them in appropriate contexts. That moral humility should be an intellectual virtue is likely to seem puzzling, if not downright implausible. Moral humility does not, in any case, appear on any standard list of intellectual virtues. My aim is to make this initially puzzling claim plausible.

## Human Pride

I begin by introducing an important background concept: namely, a personal stance or orientation that I shall refer to, quasi-technically, as 'human pride' (HP). HP has four main elements: (1) self-righteousness; (2) self-sufficiency; (3) radical autonomy; and (4) epistemic invulnerability. I address each of these elements in turn.

The first element of HP is *self-righteousness*. The self-righteous individual is deeply attached to a view of herself according to which she is fundamentally a morally good or 'good enough' person. While she may, from her own point of view, have certain flaws or imperfections, she is not in any deep or categorical way in need of forgiveness, mercy, or redemption. Consequently, the self-righteous person also tends to be highly sensitive about and resistant to negative judgements or criticisms of her moral character. When subjected to personal critique, she tends to be defensive and to rationalize the behaviour or attitude in question. (For a similar depiction of 'moral pride', see Moser 2008: 44, and Moser 2010: 113. And for rich literary illustrations of this and the other three elements of HP, see the short stories and two novels of Flannery O'Connor, e.g. O'Connor 1946, 1949, and 1955, which were the primary inspiration for the account of theistic knowledge developed here.)

The second element of HP is an orientation of *self-sufficiency*. The self-sufficient person believes that he can 'go it alone'; that he has within himself the strength and resources necessary for accomplishing what he needs or wants in life. His success and well-being do not, from his point of view, depend on the assistance or resources of other persons—certainly not on those of any divine person or deity. He can get by on his own. He has the ability to work things out, to make it all okay (here as well see Moser 2008: 43).

The third element of HP is a desire for *radical autonomy*. The radically autonomous person is her own practical authority. No one has the right to tell her what to do or how to live—how to spend her time, whom to associate with, or which ends to pursue. Her will and life are entirely her own. Consequently, the radically autonomous person is deeply recalcitrant to external authority and to any attempt to control or influence her behaviour. She is 'beholden to nothing and no one' (Plantinga 2000: 211).

The fourth and final element of HP is a kind of *epistemic invulnerability*. It consists of a felt need to control the extent and terms on which one is known by others. The epistemically invulnerable person tends to hide his true self. While he may, on occasion, offer glimpses of his genuine convictions or emotions, these glimpses come strictly on his own terms. He is the master of his own self-revelations. He is repelled by the thought that, unknown to him or in ways he has failed to authorize, others might gain epistemic access to his 'inner self'.

The four elements of HP are clearly interrelated. For instance, a self-righteous person might be plagued by feelings of guilt and shame as she struggles to reconcile her unrealistically high view of her moral status with the corresponding reality. This in turn might lead her to hide her true self from others, that is, to pursue a state of epistemic invulnerability. Similarly, a person who regards himself as self-sufficient might thereby be susceptible to a desire for radical autonomy: if he can make it on his own, who are others to tell him what to do or how to live his life? While connected in these and other ways, no element of HP is reducible to any other. A person might be self-righteous, for instance, while still comfortably depending on others for various resources and support, that is, while not striving for a state of self-sufficiency. Similarly, while self-sufficiency may contribute to a drive for radical autonomy, it need not do so: someone might be convinced that she has the resources to go it alone or to work things out on her own while freely recognizing that her attempts to do so are bound by a range of substantive moral constraints.

Taken together, these elements of HP paint a rather extreme psychological or characterological portrait. However, it clearly is possible to instantiate these elements to a greater or lesser extent and in combinations that are more or less extreme. Indeed, I take it that, in one form or another, HP is in fact a fairly familiar feature of human psychology: that we as human beings often tend towards things like insisting (beyond what is reasonable) on our own moral righteousness, trying to make it on our own instead of relying on the strength or resources of others, desiring freedom from external sources of authority that might oppose or thwart our wills, and seeking to control what others know or see of our real selves (for a similar account, see Plantinga 2000: Ch. 7). This is, in any case, something that I shall take for granted in the remainder of the chapter. My claim, then, will be that *to the extent that HP characterizes human psychology*, moral humility is an intellectual virtue relative to theistic knowledge.

Finally, while HP is admittedly a quasi-technical notion, I take it that it also answers plausibly to ordinary ways of thinking about pride. We often think of pride (understood as a negative characteristic or vice) as involving an inflated view of oneself (self-righteousness) or one's abilities (self-sufficiency), as well as an unjustified sense of entitlement vis-à-vis other persons (radical autonomy). We also think of proud persons as concealing their limitations or other personal qualities from others (epistemic invulnerability). Moreover, while something like a desire for *control*, say, clearly is relevant to more than one element of HP, it fails to cover the complete range of such elements. Self-righteousness, for instance, seems much more central to our ordinary concept of pride, understood as a vice, than it does to ordinary ways of thinking about what it is to need or yearn for control.

## The Epistemic Consequences of Human Pride

Suppose, then, that HP characterizes a significant dimension of human psychology. My aim in this section is to examine the consequences of this for our reliability within the domain of theistic inquiry.

We can do so, first, by noting the place of HP within the Christian conception of God and God's relationship to human beings. (The main elements of this conception extend to the Jewish theological tradition as well. However, given the primary focus of the present volume, together with the sources informing the present account of theistic knowledge, I will speak mainly of the 'Christian' conception of the matters at hand.) According to this conception, God is a perfect being and thus is wholly loving, powerful, and knowledgeable. Further, God is not detached from or disinterested in humanity. On the contrary, God loves human beings and desires fellowship with them. Human beings, on the other hand, are broken, fallen, and finite creatures. Our deepest need and greatest good is to be reconciled to and restored by God. Participating in such redemption involves, among other things, a pursuit of divine fellowship through faith in God and obedience to God's expectations and standards.

Thus conceived God is nothing short of a *mortal threat* to HP. While this may appear obvious, some of the details are worth dwelling on. According to the Christian model, God is perfectly good and holy. Human beings, while bearers of the divine image and loved by God, nevertheless are broken, morally impoverished, and in need of redemption. While there is, of course, a spectrum of Christian views about the exact nature and extent of human sinfulness, none would license an attitude of *self-righteousness* as described above.

The Christian model is also opposed to an attitude of *self-sufficiency*. According to this model, we are dependent and finite beings. We cannot, of our own accord, meet our deepest needs and achieve a state of deep flourishing. We lack the capacities and resources to do so. Rather, we need each other; and, more importantly, we need God. God and God alone is the source of ultimate strength and well-being. Given this way of thinking about the relation between God and humanity, the orientation of self-sufficiency described above appears arrogant, misguided, and futile. Conversely, if I am convinced that I can get by on my own resources and abilities, and if this conviction is a driving force in my life or a commitment that is central to my very identity, then the Christian idea of God is bound to appear, not merely false, but repugnant.

*Radical autonomy* fares no better according to the Christian model. For, given this model, each of us emphatically is not his or her own practical authority. On the contrary, we are all beholden to the standards and will of an omnipotent external authority. For better or worse, 'not my will be done, but yours' is the order of the day. While consistent with a significant sphere of personal freedom, Christian theology posits major constraints on human autonomy. Indeed, the New Testament calls for the very forfeiture of one's life: 'Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it' (Mt. 16:24–5).

The model in question poses an equally devastating threat to an attitude of *epistemic invulnerability*. The fact that God is personal and omniscient need not lead us to believe that God is, at every moment, conscious of or attending to each of our thoughts, feelings, or actions. It does, however, mean that God has unfettered epistemic *access* to these things. God knows who we are. We cannot elude or hide from God. Ultimate control over our self-revelations is a hopeless prospect.

This tension between HP and the Christian deity has not gone entirely unnoticed by philosophers of theistic or atheistic persuasions. Thomas Nagel, for instance, makes the following candid admission:

> I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.
>
> (Nagel 1997: 130)

What exactly does Nagel find objectionable? He describes himself as having a 'cosmic authority problem', suggesting that his hostility to the very idea of God is rooted in something like a desire for radical autonomy. He also makes the further conjecture that 'this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition and that it is responsible for much of the scientism and reductionism of our time' (131).

Paul Moser also identifies a deep tension between a characteristic human desire for radical autonomy and self-sufficiency, on the one hand, and the very concept of the Christian God, on the other hand: 'We typically favor idols over a perfectly authoritative and loving God given our penchant for maintaining authority or lordship, over our lives. Our typical attitude is thus: I will live my life *my* way, to get *what* I want, *when* I want it' (Moser 2008: 104, emphasis in original). He elaborates:

> In idolatry, we aren't satisfied with being secondary, dependent co-creators who honor God as the only self-sufficient preeminent authority. We devalue God's perfect authority with something other than God. Typically we reassign, in effect, God's supreme authority to *ourselves*, thereby seeking to be ultimately *self*-governing and *self*-defining. This involves a kind of *self*-assertion that disregards the supreme authority of God.
>
> (Moser 2008: 102, emphasis in original)

In a discussion of 'pride, that aboriginal sin', Plantinga makes a similar observation:

> And God himself, the source of my very being, can also be a threat. In my prideful desire for autonomy and self-sufficiency I can come to resent the presence of someone upon whom I depend for my every breath and by comparison with whom I am small potatoes indeed. I can therefore come to hate him too. I want to be autonomous, beholden to no one. Perhaps this is the deepest root of the condition of sin.
>
> (Plantinga 2000: 208)

Having seen that a Christian conception of God and God's relationship to humanity poses a severe threat to HP, I turn now to examine more closely the epistemic implications of this point. Specifically, how is an (even tacit) awareness of this threat likely to bear on the epistemic condition of persons whose psychology is marked in significant ways by HP?

The effect is likely to be substantial and deleterious. Given the extreme tension between the Christian theological model and HP, to the extent that my psychology is characterized by HP, I am likely to struggle with engaging in honest and open inquiry about God. While such inquiry may not be a psychological impossibility, there can be little question that I will have a vested interest in avoiding evidence that tells in favour of God's existence (throughout the chapter I employ a broad conception of evidence that includes a wide range of truth indicators like experiences and rational intuitions; thus I do not equate 'evidence' with '*propositional* evidence'). Indeed, I might feel compelled simply to avoid questions about the existence of God, to be dismissive of religious standpoints and assertions, to keep my distance (physically and psychologically) from more intelligent and thoughtful religious believers, and so on. Clearly, such activity would not bode well for the quality of my epistemic perspective on theistic matters.

This dynamic bears further consideration. There are, I suggest, at least two distinct ways in which HP is likely to have a deleterious effect on one's epistemic perspective vis-à-vis questions about the nature and existence of God (for a related discussion, see Baehr, 2011: Ch. 5). First, HP seems apt to promote the *mishandling* of evidence that is already in one's possession. For instance, my desire for ultimate authority or my deep resistance to seeing myself as someone in need of redemption might lead me to distort or misrepresent evidence I have that would otherwise support or confirm certain theistic beliefs. It might cause me to miss important logical connections or to misjudge their strength. It might lead me to avoid reflecting, or to reflect only fleetingly, on this evidence.

Second, HP is also likely to prevent one from *acquiring* some theistic evidence in the first place. Such evidence might be found in nature, books, other people, or elsewhere. Again, to the extent that my psychology is marked by HP and I have at least some sense of the tension between HP and the Christian deity, I might, as a general policy, simply avoid thinking about religious questions, spending time with religious believers whose faith might prove challenging, reading or listening to defences of religious viewpoints, and so on. HP might also cause me to miss out on a more immediate type of theistic evidence, namely, *experiential* evidence of God's existence or nature. If the Christian God exists, it is reasonable to think that such evidence might exist as well. However, it also stands to reason that God would at least sometimes withhold this evidence from persons in the grip of HP. Analogously, if I know of another person that she desires to be left alone, is opposed to being known by others, and is likely to interact with me in a guarded or elusive manner, then, out of *respect* for this person's autonomy, I am likely to refrain from engaging or acquainting myself with her. As a result, this person may end up being oblivious to my very existence; and she surely will be in the dark as to my nature. Similarly, out of respect for human beings, God might very well adopt a laissez-faire relational policy vis-à-vis persons motivated by HP. And such a policy might have epistemically significant implications.

Both Plantinga and Moser make similar observations. For Plantinga, knowledge of God is mediated via the 'sensus divinitatis', the proper functioning of which can be impeded by sin: '[T]he deliverances of the *sensus divinitatis*, muffled as they already are, can easily be suppressed and impeded. That can happen in various ways: for example, by deliberately or semi-deliberately turning one's attention away from them' (Plantinga 2000: 215). For Moser, the primary form of theistic evidence is a call to divine fellowship manifested in conscience. Individual persons are free to attend and submit to this call or to suppress and ignore it. Moser describes a rationale for resisting this call as follows:

> I many not *want* to yield on this front, because giving ground here would seem to challenge my very self-definition and everything else I have supposedly self-achieved and credited to myself. I would then be left with a serious cognitive-volitional disconnect, because I would then *apprehend* correctly that I *should* yield to God's call but still remain *unwilling* to yield to God's call. My will would then be out of line with what I have apprehended correctly regarding God's authoritative will, namely,

> that it is authoritative for myself and other humans. In that case, I may very well try to sidestep the disconnect by denying that I have actually apprehended God's call. I would then purchase cognitive-volitional coherence at the price of denying what I have actually apprehended.
>
> (Moser 2008: 77–8, emphasis in original)

For both Plantinga and Moser, a conflict between a person's will and certain considerations telling in favour of God's existence or nature can lead the person to avoid or distort these considerations, thereby impeding the person's epistemic functioning.

In the picture developed thus far, to the extent that HP has a hold on a person's psychology, there is a significant likelihood (other things being equal) that this person's epistemic perspective on the existence and nature of the Christian God will be impaired. Her evidence base may be impoverished, she may be led to deal with theistic evidence irresponsibly, and her cognitive processes may in general tend towards unreliability.

## Moral Humility as an Intellectual Virtue

I turn now to consider an antidote to HP; that is, an alternative orientation that, were it sufficiently ingrained in a person's character or psychology, would likely mitigate many of the epistemically deleterious effects of HP noted above.

This antidote is moral humility (MH). Again, I am thinking of MH as *a habitual or practised awareness and responsible acknowledgement of one's broadly practical limitations, weaknesses, and mistakes* (see Whitcomb et al. 2015 for a development of this account applied to *intellectual* humility).

Several remarks about this definition are in order. First, to say that MH involves a habitual or practised 'awareness' of certain limitations or deficiencies is to say that it involves keeping these limitations in view or 'on one's radar' as one traverses the various situations or domains to which they are relevant. Such awareness need not be especially conscious or explicit. It certainly need not involve a constant attending to or focusing on one's limitations. Indeed, in certain cases, a humble person's *actions* (rather than anything going on in his mind) may be the primary indicator that the awareness exists at all.

Second, I describe the limitations, weaknesses, and mistakes in question as 'broadly moral', in part to mark a distinction between MH and *intellectual* humility (for more on the distinction between moral virtues and intellectual virtues, see Baehr 2011: Appendix). Intellectual humility involves an awareness and acknowledgement of one's *epistemic* limitations and weaknesses such as gaps in one's knowledge, incompetence at thinking or reasoning in certain ways, or a lack of adequate support for one or more of one's beliefs. As such, intellectual humility is distinct from MH. That said, I do not wish to limit the scope of MH to *narrowly* moral limitations and weaknesses. Instead, I intend for it to include a reasonably broad range of practical limitations, for instance, limitations on one's ability to control the course of one's life or the actions of other persons. While thinking of MH in this way is important to MH's being an antidote to HP, I take it that it also fits well with ordinary ways of thinking about humility.

Third, a mere practised awareness of one's broadly moral limitations or failures cannot by itself be sufficient for MH, for such awareness could lead to psychological activity that is manifestly *uncharacteristic* of humility. For instance, if I am keenly aware of my moral limitations or failures, this might lead me to be extremely anxious or defensive about them. Or it might lead me to look down upon and criticize others as a way of trying to build myself up. For this reason, it is important to conceive of MH as also involving a *responsible acknowledgement* or 'owning' of one's moral or practical limitations and deficiencies. What exactly such acknowledgement looks like will vary from one situation to another. Where the limitation in question is, say, a moral vice, it might involve a willingness to admit to another person that one has this vice and to prevent it from guiding one's actions. Or, if the limitation concerns the fact that one does not have total control over one's life or future, 'owning' the limitation might look like pausing to remind oneself of this fact and allowing this realization to inform one's practical reasoning (i.e. it need not involve an attempt to *alter* or *eradicate* the limitation).

How exactly, and to what extent, is MH an *antidote* to HP? First, with very few (if any) exceptions, a person whose character is marked by MH is unlikely to be very *self-righteous*. I take it that I am not being too pessimistic about human nature to suggest that if we were genuinely aware of and willing to 'own' the full extent of our broadly moral limitations, weaknesses, and mistakes—the various ways in which we fall short, the harm we cause to others, the limited resources we have to control our lives or to solve all of our own problems—this would significantly undercut whatever inclination we might have to think of ourselves as especially morally righteous.

Similarly, a morally humble person in our sense is unlikely to be inclined towards *self-sufficiency*. Here as well I assume that I am not underestimating the practical resources of human beings by asserting that those among us who have given up trying to avoid or deny—and rather have come to accept—their broadly moral limitations will not be prone to think or act as if they can 'go it alone' in life, as if they can achieve a meaningful and satisfying existence entirely on their own, without any significant dependence on the resources or support of others. On the contrary, such persons are likely to recognize that, in many important spheres of life, they have little if any ultimate control. And they are likely to possess an appropriate willingness to rely on—perhaps even to seek out—the support and resources of others.

As should be evident, MH is a direct antidote to the self-righteousness and self-sufficiency elements of HP. However, it stands somewhat differently with respect to the radical autonomy and epistemic invulnerability elements.

To see how MH is related to *radical autonomy*, we can begin by considering how the latter is related to the two elements of HP just considered. If I think of myself as above moral reproach (self-righteousness) and as capable of getting by on my own (self-sufficiency), this might very well deepen my resistance to external authority. I might view myself as not needing any mercy, support, or guidance from others. Now recall the undercutting effect of MH on self-righteousness and self-sufficiency: if I am sensitive to my own broadly moral limitations and failures in the manner characteristic of MH, this is likely to have a significant mitigating effect on any tendency I have towards self-righteousness or self-sufficiency; indeed, it is to acknowledge that I am not morally 'good enough' and that I cannot get by entirely on my own strength and resources. This in turn seems likely to have a mitigating effect on any tendency I might have towards radical autonomy. Having repudiated self-righteousness and self-sufficiency, it stands to reason that I would be more likely to acknowledge—even to seek out—the guidance and authority of others.

A similar point can be made about the relation between MH and *epistemic invulnerability*. Recall that self-righteousness and self-sufficiency involve having some (arguably) badly mistaken beliefs about oneself (e.g. that one is morally righteous or that one can get by strictly on one's own resources). Provided that most of us are far from morally righteous or self-sufficient, it is not unreasonable to think that, to the extent that I am in the grip of a self-righteous and self-sufficient attitude, I will at least occasionally have a sense that the beliefs in question are false. That is, I will, on occasion, get the sense (however implicit or subconscious) that I *do* need the forgiveness and mercy of others or that I *cannot* make it entirely on my own. This in turn might lead to feelings of anxiety, guilt, and shame as I experience the discrepancy between these competing impressions of myself. It is not difficult to imagine the further effect this is likely to have on my orientation towards others. Specifically, I am likely to resist being known by others for fear that they too might become aware of (thereby making even more salient to myself) my moral and practical shortcomings or failures. It seems likely, in other words, to lead to a state of epistemic invulnerability. Suppose, then, that over time I begin to grow in MH. It should now be clear how, as my self-righteousness and self-sufficiency become undone by my growing MH, this is also likely to have a substantial mitigating effect on my desire for epistemic invulnerability. Having come to terms with or 'owned' my moral and practical limitations and failures, I will have fewer reasons to hide from others.

We have considered at some length the relation between MH and the core elements of HP. We have seen that MH is a powerful antidote to HP. This is not to say that it is a complete or perfect antidote. MH is not derived from or a mirror image of HP. Nevertheless, having examined the relationship between MH and HP, we are now in a position to appreciate the way in which MH is an intellectual virtue. This is a two-part story. The first part of the story concerns the ways that HP stands to interfere with and undermine proper epistemic functioning in the context of theistic inquiry. Several of these ways were detailed in the previous section. The second part of the story concerns the ways, just discussed, that MH mitigates HP; that is, the ways it serves to mute, diminish, or eliminate self-righteousness, self-sufficiency, radical autonomy, and epistemic invulnerability. It is, then, in this mitigating or corrective capacity that MH does its epistemic work and thus qualifies as an intellectual or epistemic virtue. My claim is not that MH is an intellectual virtue across the board or across an especially wide range of domains. It is, however, an intellectual virtue when it comes to questions about the truth of Christian theism or about the existence or nature of the Christian God.

Finally, I conclude this section by noting that MH is an intellectual virtue, not just for the faithful, but for *anyone* who is interested in getting to the truth about the Christian God and whose psychology is marked by HP. First, note that nothing about the foregoing argument presupposes the truth of the Christian model. The central claim has been that the very *idea* or *concept* of God (regardless of whether this idea corresponds to anything in reality) is hostile to the ambitions and values that constitute HP, such that, to the extent that one is in the grip of HP, one's reliability in the domain of theistic inquiry is likely to be compromised. Second, we have also observed that if the Christian God *were* to exist, it is likely that access to some evidence of God's existence would be reserved for those whose character or psychology is marked by MH. It follows that even agnostic inquirers and committed atheists should be able to recognize the potentially epistemically beneficial effects of MH vis-à-vis questions about the existence or nature of God. Provided that such persons desire to reach the truth about these questions, they too should be concerned about the extent to which their character might be marked by HP.

## An Objection

I turn now to consider an important objection. At a general level, the picture defended in the previous section is one according to which a relatively common feature of human psychology threatens to render us epistemically unreliable when it comes to theistic inquiry. Specifically, HP is likely to dispose us unfavorably to the truth of the Christian theological model, such that the quality of our evidence and cognitive functioning relative to this model will be significantly diminished.

However, it might reasonably be pointed out that there are *other* dimensions of human psychology that also threaten to render us unreliable with regard to theistic questions—but in the other direction, as it were. The most salient such quality is a well-documented fear of death and corresponding desire for *transcendence* or *immortality* (Freud 1961; Becker 1973). Christian theism, of course, holds out great hope in the face of this desire: it promises, among other things, 'everlasting life'. Accordingly, the human desire for transcendence (DT) also seems likely to dispose us to the truth of the Christian model in a way that diminishes the quality of our thinking and reasoning about this model. However, it does so in a way *opposite* to HP. While we might think of HP as making us 'too hard' on theistic matters or evidence, DT seems likely to make us 'too soft'.

I do not wish to dispute that DT is a familiar and deeply rooted feature of human psychology; nor will I dispute that DT could have an impact on the quality of our cognitive functioning relative to theism that is at least roughly on par with that of HP. The important question, for our purposes, is what, if any, implications this has for the argument put forth in this chapter. How, if at all, does it bear on the case for thinking of MH as an intellectual virtue in the relevant sense?

One possible reply would be that, given these facts about DT, it follows that MH is *not* in fact an intellectual virtue relative to theistic belief—indeed that it may be an intellectual *vice*. The argument might go like this: DT disposes us to be (unwarrantedly) epistemically soft vis-à-vis theistic questions and evidence; MH is likely to magnify or compound such softness, thereby undermining our reliability vis-à-vis theistic belief; therefore, MH is not an intellectual virtue.

This argument is problematic. First, it is not at all clear that MH would compound the epistemic weakness introduced by DT. Other things being equal, MH seems likely to make a person more open to theistic belief. However, the content of MH is such that it may actually serve to *temper* DT. The morally humble person, in our sense, is attentive to and can comfortably 'own' or acknowledge her broadly moral limits, which, as we have seen, include certain practical limits. It is not hard to imagine that part of what this might involve is an acceptance of one's mortality. If this is right, then MH might serve to blunt DT in a way that would in fact have a net *positive* effect on one's epistemic functioning relative to theistic belief. It might make one feel less acutely the 'need' for immortality.

A second reply involves turning the objection on its head. We have noted that DT might have epistemically deleterious effects on our reliability in relation to theistic questions and evidence. In the same way that we identified MH as an antidote to HP, we should think about which qualities or traits might mitigate the negative effects of DT. One obvious candidate here is something like intellectual *caution*. An intellectually cautious person is slow to jump to conclusions; she is thoughtful and circumspect about factors that might be influencing her epistemic perspective or activity (for an extended discussion of intellectual caution, see Roberts and Wood 2007: Ch. 8). Applied to DT and theistic belief, we would expect such a person to be aware, at least to some extent, of her attachment to any goods the reality of which might be entailed by theism, and to take steps to mitigate the influence of this perception on her own pursuit, assessment, and response to theistic evidence. If inclined to draw a conclusion favourable to theism, for instance, she would consider, seriously and honestly, whether this assessment might be driven less by the evidence and more by her desire that theism be true. And, if she found reason to be concerned, she would pull back, withhold judgement, and resume her inquiry.

Now return to the objection above that calls into question whether MH really is an intellectual virtue. The present point is that a structurally identical argument can be offered for thinking that intellectual caution is not an intellectual virtue. For, while DT may dispose us towards theistic belief in a way that is unwarrantedly favourable, we have seen that HP has a tendency to dispose us towards theistic belief in a way that is unwarrantedly *hostile* or *unfavourable*. Accordingly, it could be argued that intellectual caution serves to compound this effect, making its possessor even *less* reliable vis-à-vis theistic belief. But it would be wrong-headed to conclude that intellectual caution is not an intellectual virtue in the relevant context—that we ought not, say, to be cautious and circumspect in our handling of theistic evidence when we know that we have a strong (arational) desire favouring the truth of theism. Neither, then, should we refrain from thinking of MH as an intellectual virtue.

The foregoing discussion suggests that when it comes to approaching and handling theistic evidence, we should, to the extent that we are inclined towards HP and DT, seek to cultivate or practise both MH and intellectual caution. Is this somehow a problematic prescription? I see no reason to think so. I certainly have not argued that MH is the *only* intellectual virtue relative to theistic belief. Indeed, I began the chapter by noting that other, more standard intellectual virtues (e.g. open-mindedness, intellectual carefulness, attentiveness, intellectual thoroughness) are also very important in this domain. Nor is MH anything like the contrary of intellectual caution. There is no inherent or principled tension between these two states. Rather, we can think of them as playing complementary roles within a person's epistemic economy. As we have seen, MH is useful for overcoming the obstacle that HP poses to optimal epistemic functioning in the relevant domain. We have also seen, however, that intellectual caution plays an important role in relation to a different epistemic obstacle: namely, DT. Moreover, even in its mitigating role vis-à-vis HP, MH needs to be constrained by intellectual caution and many other virtues like intellectual thoroughness, carefulness, and honesty. MH is, then, one of a number of intellectual virtues relevant to theistic inquiry.

This gives rise to a final question. The point just made might lead one to wonder: Is MH really an *essential* intellectual virtue when it comes to theistic inquiry? In the same way that a person who knows he is firmly in the grip of DT might, in the face of assessing a set of proposed reasons for thinking that God exists, step back and exercise a range of familiar intellectual virtues (e.g. intellectual caution, honesty, carefulness, thoroughness), why not simply say the same thing about a person who knows he is firmly in the grip of HP? In other words, why not think that an exercise of standard virtues would be enough?

I have three replies to this question. First, nothing about the question threatens the foregoing argument in support of thinking of MH as an intellectual virtue. For it does nothing to undermine the idea that MH is a broadly effective way of improving one's epistemic functioning relative to theistic belief. Second, the question is whether, in the face of HP, an exercise of standard intellectual virtues would generally be sufficient. But sufficient for what? For optimal epistemic functioning? This seems unlikely. I do not doubt that intellectual honesty, open-mindedness, fair-mindedness, and the like might go some way towards combatting the negative epistemic effects of HP. They are, however, no substitute for MH. The role of MH described above is not merely reparative. The kind of freedom from HP provided by MH has the potential not just to improve one's assessment of evidence already in one's possession, but also to provide one with access to further evidence that might otherwise be out of reach. I have a hard time imagining an exercise of standard intellectual virtues having this kind of effect. It makes greater sense to think of standard virtues as having the potential to improve the quality of epistemic functioning *within* the constraints or limitations posed by HP, but not to break down or transcend these constraints. (A related question is whether an exercise of standard virtues might, when combined with true belief and other constitutive elements, be sufficient for theistic or atheistic *knowledge*.

While I cannot take up this question here, I think the answer depends both on how exactly one conceives of the nature of knowledge and the precise bearing of HP or DT in the particular case.) Third, we have seen that MH may yield access to a powerful and more immediate type of theistic evidence, namely, immediate evidence of God's presence, nature, intentions, and the like. Again, we saw that God might choose to manifest himself in a person's experience or consciousness on account of the person's MH. I see little reason to think that the same would be true for a person who is still substantially in the grip of HP but who is doing her best to combat its effects by exercising standard intellectual virtues.

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion, let us consider a kind of practical application of the discussion in the previous section. Suppose a person, Jones, is preparing to engage in some form of intellectual activity (e.g. forming a belief, drawing an inference, reading a particular book or article, engaging in a conversation) aimed at getting at the truth about a particular theistic proposition (e.g. that God is real or that something like Judaeo-Christian theism is true). The upshot of the preceding discussion is that Jones would do well at this point to step back and take stock of how certain aspects of his character or psychology might bear on his epistemic suitability for this task. One question he might do well to ask himself—or, perhaps better, to pose to others who know him well—is: What kind of hold does DT have on me? How might DT influence the intellectual activity I am preparing to engage in? To the extent that Jones has reason to think that his epistemic functioning in the present context could be impaired by DT, he would do well to take appropriate measures to keep DT in check—for example, reasoning in ways that are particularly careful, cautious, and circumspect. However, we have seen that Jones would *also* do well to step back and ask himself or others who know him well: To what extent is my character or psychology marked by HP, that is, by self-righteousness, self-sufficiency, radical autonomy, or epistemic invulnerability? Here too, to the extent that he is given cause for concern, Jones would do well not merely to try to counteract the effects of HP by trying to be open-minded, fair-minded, intellectually honest, and the like, but also to do so by pursuing greater MH. The latter practice might play a crucial role in improving the quality of Jones's intellectual activity. In this respect, MH can be seen to be an intellectual virtue on equal footing with more familiar intellectual virtues.

### Acknowledgements

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## Suggested Reading

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## CHAPTER 15

# EVIDENCE AND THEOLOGY

TRENT DOUGHERTY

## INTRODUCTION

### Some Preliminary Issues

Theology is a cognitive discipline. It aims at truth about God, as source of all contingent being, and then, derivatively, at truths about creatures as they are related to God. It makes truth claims about God, and all such claims are subject to evaluation as true or false, reasonable or unreasonable, clear or vague.

Theology has a point (goal, end). It is not merely a cognitive discipline but also meant to be life-transforming, or at least ancillary to the process of salvation. If we love God, then the more we understand him, the more there is to love. If we seek to be like God in the ways creatures can, then the more we can understand him, the more we can imitate him. Though theology is *more than* intellectual, it is *at least* intellectual. Theology has intimately related cognitive *and* salvific dimensions.

This chapter will limit its scope to one important aspect of the cognitive side of theology. Such an emphasis does not entail contrasting the 'cognitive' with the 'experiential' or even the 'affective'. The two are connected. Part of transformation is to bring 'every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ' (2 Cor. 10:5, NKJV). And 'Whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him' (Heb. 11:6, NRSV). That the dichotomies between the cognitive and the salvific are false, however, does not tell against an intuitive distinction between thinking about the truth claims of a theological 'system' (by which I only mean a set of truth claims with a logical structure) and experiencing the life-transforming power that system may have. The best preaching is theologically rich, but the role of the preacher is not primarily to theologize when preaching the Gospel as if it was a class in seminary. Likewise, the theologian's craft is rightly ordered to the preaching of the Gospel, but when she writes a theological treatise, she is not primarily preaching the Gospel. Even if there is partial overlap in the categories, even if they are part of a vague spectrum with no clear line between them, we can consider paradigm instances of operating in the cognitive mode rather than in the pastoral mode.

## *Propositions*

A crucial cognitive aspect of theology is the marshalling of evidence for its truth claims. We call the content of a truth claim a 'proposition' because one who makes an assertion *proposes* that what they assert is true. Sometimes we can give a good description of the proposition asserted. For example, if I say in a normal context, 'The sum of the interior angles of a triangle is equal to the sum of two right angles', I can give a fuller and more precise description of the proposition asserted. For other assertions, we cannot give a fuller and more precise description of the propositional content. For example, if I were to say, in a normal context, 'When she looks at me like that I go squishy inside', there is no doubt a proposition is being asserted, but I cannot do very well at being more precise without also being misleading (for example, even if I could describe precisely one part of the phenomenology, the feeling in my stomach, say, you might think I were ill instead of in love). Quite a different example involves a scientific claim. If I were to say, in a normal context, 'Einstein's special theory of relativity is true', I would not be speaking in total ignorance. For example, I could point out the interesting fact that mass–energy equivalence holds regardless of unit of measure. I could also give you a bit of the history of how Einstein came up with it while investigating inertia and other phenomena. However, this would only scratch the surface as a description of the proposition I had expressed. Yet this does not stop the utterance from expressing the proposition. Our verbal reach exceeds our mental grasp: we can express propositions only a fraction of which we can grasp.

## *A Category Mistake?*

A plausible objection to the above characterization goes like this:

> Yes, theology is a cognitive discipline, but it does not follow that theologians use evidence. Theologians start with dogmas or scripture or the dictates of a special community devoted to a special set of practices that can be accepted or rejected but not questioned. The cognitive aspect of theology is merely deducing the consequences of these unquestioned starting points.

A full reply to this concern would require a brief overview of the nature of evidence as such, but the short version is that even in such models there is an important kind of evidence involved: *testimonial evidence*. Whether it be the dictates of scripture or the authorities of a particular community, the starting point is the testimony of a divinely approved source, whether an ecclesial body or a biblical author or other authority. Some may consider God the primary author of scripture, in which case the evidence is the testimony of God, the best kind of evidence one could have (for more on the notion of authority in faith, see Lamont 2004: esp. 20ff, and Dougherty 2014b).

### *Jerusalem and Athens?*

A more radical objection claims that the above attributes too much of a cognitive role to theology, for it envisions the theologian applying reason to the testimony. In this model, one merely reads scripture and the Holy Spirit 'applies it to one's heart', bypassing the human mind entirely. Reading scripture is merely an occasion for God to bring it about that the reader has the correct thoughts, which could be actually connected to the text or not. Since there is not supposed to be any reasoning involved, if there is a connection, the reader's understanding is merely a pre-established harmony. This view is distinct from the view that God removes blindness to allow the reader of scripture to see the point of it. That would still involve the cognitive processing of data. This is about the only kind of view one could endorse in which theology does not involve the use of evidence.

### *Apophaticism*

A yet more radical objection claims that the previous position attributes to theology too much of a cognitive component. This view (represented by an extreme apophaticism) denies that human concepts apply to God at all (even the concept of being unconceptualizable) or that we can say anything meaningful about how God really is at all. This position seems to represent the extreme of non-cognitivism about theology. Yet those who back such views are still doing theology and offering arguments for their view. They take as evidence for their views facts about human finitude or the nature of language or some such. Thus, these theologians do use evidence, even though they are at the extreme end of non-cognitivism in a certain sense. For example, suppose we asked the apophaticist (who says something like 'We can only know what God is not') whether God is a carrot. Suppose they answer 'No, for carrots are finite', to which we reply, 'How do you know God isn't an infinite carrot?' Presumably, we would receive the reply that no carrot can be infinite, since it is embodied. Unless we are prepared to defend the possibility of infinite disembodied carrots, we must admit that we have some kind of answer (though not one that bring us much closer to what God is). Thus, even the extreme apophaticist will use some of the very kinds of reasoning that natural theologians employ. There are putatively less extreme forms of apophaticism, but, like all moderate views, they are much harder to express.

# OF EVIDENCE IN GENERAL

## 'Evidence' and Evidence

'Evidence' is used in many ways (λέγεται πολλαχώς). Perhaps the most common usage of the term is in a legal context. In such a context a bloody knife or other physical *object* might count as evidence. This is very different from other contexts—a debate, say—where one presents what one takes to be *facts* as evidence. A person is asked 'What is your evidence?' and they will offer facts in reply. Facts are not physical objects; they are abstract objects such as true propositions or obtaining states of affairs. And of course propositions serve as the content of thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. And it is common to advert to such things when asked for evidence. 'Why do you think Maria is at the party?' 'Because I saw her'. However, if pressed—'Are you sure you saw her?'—it is natural to offer more basic states of consciousness in reply as more basic evidence—'Well I appeared to see a girl with black hair and green eyes, etc., so I am pretty sure'. So there is a move inward, towards the subject, when we seek the 'rock bottom' notion of evidence: experience. That our ultimate evidence consists in experience explains the fact-citing usage of 'evidence', for in those cases people are citing what they *take* to be facts. They will not (and usually cannot) cite facts of which they are unaware, and they will cite non-factual material if they *believe* it to be facts. So the mental state is more basic. And the usage that refers to physical objects as 'evidence' is one where the object 'stands for' what we *take to be* a fact. Though many usages of the word 'evidence' exist, there is one basic notion of evidence: experience. There are many other derived notions of evidence, such as facts and physical objects.[1]

## The Roles of Evidence and the Ontology of Evidence

One way to capture the essence of a thing is to look at the roles it performs and then ask what is most suited to play that role. Sometimes, several things might play all the roles, in which case one might opt for some kind of pluralism, and sometimes no one thing might play all the roles, in which case one might opt to draw a distinction among concepts. Thomas Kelly has identified the following roles evidence is expected to play (Kelly 2014):

1. Evidence is that which justifies belief
2. Rational thinkers respect their evidence
3. Evidence is a guide to truth
4. Evidence is a neutral arbiter

I will briefly comment upon the suitability of experiences to play these roles before moving on to the evidencing relation itself (for a fuller treatment, see Dougherty and Rysiew 2014). Though experience will be vindicated as being the most fundamental form of evidence, anything that in some context rightly plays these roles at a higher level is appropriately considered a derivative form of 'evidence'.

### *Justifying Belief*

When we consider the different things referred to as 'evidence' in the various contexts above, which ones suit these roles best and most basically? It seems from the start that we can rule out the legal use of 'evidence'. For it is not *objects* that justify belief or that rational thinkers respect, etc. Rather, we would be more inclined to say that it is the *fact that* said objects have certain features—say, that they were found in the accused's car. But, again, people cite as evidence what they *take* to be facts *as indicated by their experience*. If someone gives you the wrong address and you arrive at the house with the address you were given, you did nothing at all *unjustified*. This pushes in the direction of seeing ultimate evidence as consisting in mental states such as beliefs, perceptual states, and other experiences. And this is a natural way to think and speak. If I ask for evidence that the temperature has dropped, you have every right to take your feeling cold as an indication that it is so. Some theorists about evidence (Williamson 2000) draw a distinction between justification and culpability, saying that turning left when the directions falsely say 'turn left' really is unjustified but one has an excuse and is therefore inculpable. This, however, confuses the person-relative *ought* that governs *behaviour* with the teleological *ought* by which we judge *outcomes*.

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[1] For an interesting account of direct experiential evidence for theological truths, see Chapter 4 of Abraham 2006.

### *What Rational Thinkers Respect*

The second role follows closely the thinking in the first. When we say that evidence is what rational thinkers respect, we mean not just that they are rational only if they respect their evidence, whatever that is, but also that to find out what evidence is, one must look at what it is that rational people respect. And since it is possible to have justified false beliefs and misleading experiences, what rational people respect will sometimes be false or misleading. It is unfortunate when this occurs—it is an unfavorable outcome—but it does not affect our judgement about the rationality of the individual. This rules out facts from playing the second role. Basic evidence will have to consist in some kind of mental state.

### *Evidence as a Guide to Truth*

Think of a very simple case of learning truth: looking and seeing. We look at a red mug. Light waves from the mug pass onto the retina, certain neurons fire, and our consciousness takes on a certain character. The state of consciousness is the terminus of a line of causation from the object, and the experience 'reveals' the object to us. It is thus a sign or a token of the object; in short, it is our evidence for its existence. Sadly, sometimes experience is misleading, but the existence of misleading evidence need not trouble the realistic fallibilist (see Dougherty 2011b).

### *Neutral Arbiter*

Some will object that beliefs and experiences are not suited to play the fourth role. How could private, subjective experiences be a neutral arbiter, giving objectivity and intersubjectivity to inquiry? This is not a hard question to answer. Via testimony, I can reveal to you the contents of my mind. If a group of people witnesses a crime, and eighteen against twenty agree that they saw a silver flash in the hand of the accused, their private experiences collectively amount to an intersubjective ('public') arbiter.

## Experience as Ultimate Evidence in Christian Tradition

I have defended the thesis that only experience qualifies as 'ultimate evidence', the evidence that serves as the starting point or the touchstones of rational belief. This view has detractors (see Williamson 2014), but even if one was firmly committed to evidence as facts, basic evidence could be restricted to facts about experience. And even if one wanted to restrict evidence to known facts, basic evidence could be restricted to knowledge of one's own mental states. Thus, experience still does the explaining.

The view that basic evidence consists in experience also has much classical support. Saint Augustine has this to say in response to the academic sceptics:

> I do not see how the Academician can refute him who says: 'I know that this appears white to me, I know that my hearing is delighted with this, I know that this has an agreeable odor, I know that this tastes sweet to me, I know that this feels cold to me.' … I say that, when a person tastes something, he can honestly swear that he knows it is sweet to his palate or the contrary, and that no trickery of the Greeks can disposess him of that knowledge.
>
> (*Contra Academicos*, as quoted in Chisholm 1966: 30)

These remarks were written in response to the anti-certainty remarks of the weak 'New Academic' sceptic (i.e. he rejected the possibility of certain knowledge but allowed for probability) Carneades. But both Carneades and Augustine supported the principle that it is more reasonable to trust appearances than not to (when one has no reason not to trust them; see Chisholm 1966: 30ff., and Chisholm 1977: 7ff.). And they were later echoed by Descartes (who not for the first time drew—without acknowledgment—upon Augustine). Like Augustine, Descartes says that even if sceptics make us worry about the external world, 'still it is at least quite *certain that it seems to me that* I see light, that I hear noise and that I feel heat' (Descartes, *Meditations* 1996: 67, emphasis added). So, the position that experience is the ultimate epistemic foundation has ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary support. It is not a settled issue, but I will take it as settled in what follows.

It will be well to end with an application from science. So suppose you truly claim to have discovered a new planet, and I ask you for the evidence. And I'm not just curious; I have initiated, let's assume, what Chisholm (1977) calls a 'Socratic' line of questioning. So when you describe the evidence, I, like a child, am going to repeat the question 'What's your evidence for *that*?' until we reach a natural stopping point. So suppose you mention that part of your evidence consists in verifying that there are perturbations in a certain asteroid belt. 'What's your evidence for *that*?' 'Well, a number of the larger asteroids in this belt don't take the trajectory that would be predicted by the absence of a massive object in the region'. 'What's your evidence for *that*?' … This could go on for quite some time. Thankfully, we can cut to the chase. At the end of this chain, all you can do is say that when you looked into the telescope, a certain image was generated in your imagination. After that, my question is meaningless or obviously out of place or implies making a category mistake. However you slice it, the spade is turned. Experience is our ultimate evidential bedrock (whether we say that the experience itself is the evidence, as I tend to think, and will so speak, or you think facts about experience or propositional contents of experience are evidence).

## The Evidential Support Relation

When I ask students in my class what the evidence for evolution is, they typically get pretty close pretty quick. But when I ask them 'Why does *that* support *this*?' I am usually met with blank stares. So, I ask them, consider the following item of (derived) 'evidence'. A cluster of cranial features—cranial capacity, ridge brow, etc.—all consistently trend from more simian to more humanoid over the course of hundreds of thousands of years.

So why does *that* item of evidence favour the theses of common descent? Well, what would the truth of evolution lead us to expect? How well do the data fit into the story of evolution? The fit seems good, because as the story of evolution unfolds, this sort of trend is just what we expect. You can see this same kind of phenomenon at work in popular lawyer or doctor TV shows and best in popular crime-scene shows. The doctor or detective or investigator constructs a narrative that weaves the data—the evidence—into a coherent fabric that makes sense as a whole. To the extent that the narrative holds together, each part supports the rest. If a proposed narrative—the hypothesis—makes sense out of the data (tells a story in which the evidence fits naturally) then the data support that hypothesis.

So *story* is the key to understanding the nature of evidential support. To a first approximation, an item of evidence E supports a hypothesis H to the extent that H tells the best story about E. This connects with the literature in the philosophy of science on 'inference to the best explanation' (IBE; for more on IBE, see Lipton 2004 ). There are many approaches to IBE in the literature and some connect with formal probability theory (Schupbach and Sprenger 2011). The details can be fleshed out in many ways. What is uncontroversial is that IBE is the best approach to realism in the philosophy of science. In this respect, the epistemology of theology and the epistemology of science are of a piece.

## Evidence in Theology

### Whether Theology Is a Science and whether it Is like Science

When Saint Thomas asked 'whether theology is a science', he was asking whether theology—'sacred doctrine' in particular, so called because it drew from sacred scripture—proceeded by a certain method and produced a certain kind of outcome.

A science deduced its conclusions from its foundational principles and produced *scientia*, 'certain' knowledge (the scare quotes are because Saint Thomas mostly used 'certain' in an objective sense, rather than to express a state of mind as we mostly do today). When I ask whether theology is like science, I am asking, perhaps, an updated version of the same question Aquinas asked. I am asking whether theology proceeds by a certain kind of method and produces a certain kind of outcome. Whereas Aquinas was interested in deduction, I am interested in induction. And whereas Aquinas was interested in certain knowledge, I am interested in probable judgements.

Deduction can be generalized to induction. That is, deductive arguments can be seen as a special, limiting case of inductive arguments: roughly, a deductive argument is a maximally strong inductive argument. Any deductive argument can be recast as a model wherein only one possible story can accommodate the data or in which certain stories are shown to be logically inconsistent with the data. And certainty is just a special case of probable judgement: maximally strong judgement. One of the advances of the modern era is recognition of the fact that we don't need epistemological certainty to have the confidence required by any area of life.

There are certainly conditionals we can be certain of (at least theoretically): *If God said it, then it is true*. But for no proposition is there epistemological certainty that God said it. This of course does not preclude subjective certitude about whether God exists. One has subjective certitude when one has no 'real' or measurable doubt about a proposition. For example, we can't have epistemic certainty—evidential probability 1—that there is an external world beyond our senses, but there is no real reason to doubt it, no reason to doubt it worth taking seriously, and so subjective certitude about the existence of the external world is warranted (see Dougherty 2014a).

In Aquinas's day, prior to an important phase of the scientific revolution regarding inductive inference and the experimental method, there was deep suspicion of belief that could not be deduced from foundational principles that were taken to be 'certain' in some way. Plato had sung the praises of necessary truth, and it seemed obvious that the only way to arrive at a necessary truth was via a priori *reasoning*. Mathematics, especially geometry, was a prime example. However, today we know even mathematicians use empirical reasoning. Mathematician Kurt Gödel used empirical reasoning for certain conjectures in the mathematics of infinity. The solution to the 'Monty Hall' problem in probability was partly reached via empirical methods. Here is a simple example. Goldbach's conjecture (in its modern form) suggests that every even number greater than two is the sum of two primes. There is currently no 'mathematical' proof of this 'conjecture'. However, computers have verified it up to $10^{18}$. So an exception would be very surprising and there are very few mathematicians who doubt it.

So we have learned that knowledge is not so nicely divided between the inductive and the deductive and we have learned to live with uncertain knowledge (Franklin 2001 and Hacking 2006 give a detailed history of the very early usage of the notion of probability in every aspect of life). Some theologians have also learned to live without certainty. I conclude that theology is indeed like science in that its method is broadly inductive and confirms 'theories' (interpretations of scripture, proposed doctrines;

the term 'theory' may have some connotations that are not apropos to theology, even though the term itself only means a truth claim about a non-obvious matter) via inference to the best explanation. When, say, biblical theologians propose that some passage be translated this way or that way, they attempt to tell a story such that the conjunction of their story and the background data, so arranged, can be seen to be natural and fitting. They seek to show that their interpretation is the best way to complete the story started by the evidence. If they are successful, the evidence will confirm their interpretation. This is exactly how it works in the interpretation of any text or even any speech. Thus biblical theology uses the same general method as literary criticism, but with 'local' adaptations. But these adaptations are not different in kind from the adaptations one would make moving from, say, Shakespeare studies to the study of Vedic literature. The same is true for forensic science generally, most obviously history. And the same is true for theories of the atonement or any other doctrine. Thus systematic theology also, at the general level, uses the same method just described. In each subdiscipline, there will be some set of generally agreed-upon data—drawn from scripture, tradition, and reason, that three-legged stool upon which the theologian sits—which constitutes Chapter 1, as it were. They then attempt to tell the rest of the story in a way that is a natural extension or completion of the story begun by the data. In so doing, they are not doing something merely similar to the natural scientist, they are doing *exactly* the same thing only with a distinct (but not wholly disjoint) data set and local adaptations to species.

## Rationality of Theological Beliefs

Recall Kelly's four roles for evidence listed above:

1. Evidence is that which justifies belief
2. Rational thinkers respect their evidence
3. Evidence is a guide to truth
4. Evidence is a neutral arbiter

I will now consider in each case how evidence plays that particular role in theological theorizing.

### *Righteous Theology*

Epistemologists often talk about 'justified' belief. To distinguish the type of justification they have in mind from, say, moral justification, they often call it 'epistemic justification'. Unfortunately, because of twentieth-century epistemology's strange obsession with knowledge, the phrase 'epistemic justification' frequently came to name the normative component of true belief in virtue of which it became knowledge. And in an age of naturalism, there emerged externalist theories of knowledge and 'epistemic justification' that were completely out of touch with the normative concerns that animated early modern thinkers like Descartes and Locke as well as the early twentieth-century epistemologists and philosophers of science who raised the issue of justification most clearly.

The Christian theologian is well situated to recover the original nature of 'justification' applied to belief. For in Christian soteriology, the concept of justification (δικαίωσις) is still closely tied to the idea of righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). Justification entails *making righteous* ('fic' is the combining form of the root of *facio* whence 'factory'. Compare 'beauti*fic*ation', 'magni*fic*ation'). And the idea of righteousness is inseparable from the agent's perspective. People cannot be righteous apart from key factors having to do with their own intentions, etc. This is not a matter that needs to separate Protestants and Catholics. True, some Protestants believe in a 'legal fiction' kind of justification (such as Luther's '*simul justus et peccator*'), but most of these theologians also believe that, in Heaven anyway, the blessed will actually become righteous. All I am appealing to here is the idea that justification in its central Western conception is not an externalist notion (the phrases '*declared* righteous' or 'righteous *in the eyes of God*' only confirm this). Justification ascriptions are sensitive to features of the agent's own mental states: morally, to intent; and epistemically, to evidence. Thus one's theological views can measure up or fail to measure up to the evidence.

But theologians should seek for righteousness in their holding to doctrine as well as action. They should seek to have their theological claims measure up to the evidence in the same way they should seek to have their religious actions measure up to the standard of piety. This is a form of *Lex orandi est lex credendi*. Thus one role of evidence in theology is to serve as the standard to justify theological beliefs. This is a special application of a more general principle, yet the duty to justify one's assertions (the expression of a belief) rises in proportion to the importance of the subject matter. And since in theology the subject matter is God himself, there is no discipline with a greater burden to have righteous beliefs.

### *Reasonable Theologians*

There is a related but distinct assessment not of beliefs but of *belief-formation practices*. This primarily concerns the duty to inquire, or to uncover evidence. This is different from having beliefs fit the evidence you *do* have. The present subject concerns what evidence you *ought* to have. But the application is parallel. The more important the subject matter, the greater the duty to inquire diligently (see Dougherty 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2014a). Clearly, no one has a more stringent duty than theologians to diligently research their proposals.

### *All Truth Is God's Truth*

Unless God creates in one a belief *ex nihilo*, the only way to come to hold true beliefs on any subject is to consult the *signs* of truth, to follow the evidence you have. This includes testimonial evidence. And of course there could be no better testimonial evidence than God's say-so. But there is also the problem of validating that God has so said. God might speak in a special revelation to an individual, but that involves many issues we cannot get into here. But in the Christian tradition God has spoken principally in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus came to guide us to truth about God. Not just any truths, either, but truths that pertain to our union with God. So it is important for those who want union with God to get the truth about how God intends for us to think and live. Since God is the greatest, truths about him are the greatest truths, and we should want to know these for their own sake. And if truth is the end, then evidence is the means.

### *Reasonable Theological Disagreement*

Religious beliefs are very fundamental to those who hold them. However, except for extremists, they are not the most fundamental. For example, someone committed to the literal truth of all scripture should, if it is shown clearly that this doctrine entails the lesser value of some race of human, give up that view. The equality of races of humans is more fundamental than the belief in the literal truth of scripture, for non-extremists. Evidence that scripture teaches such a thing is evidence that scripture did not come from God, who cannot lie. And there is a rational counterpart to this moral priority. For the moral case is just a specific instance of the more general principle that evidence that scripture teaches an untruth is evidence that it is not from God. Because there are narrower and broader religious claims in a hierarchy and because there are 'secular' truths more fundamental than some theological ones (again, think young-earth creationism), theologians in disagreement about some matter can seek deeper or broader truths to appeal to for adjudicating the dispute. Results will vary by user, but in principle, this route is available for reasonable theologians.

## What Things Play the Role of Evidence in Theology?

In line with the pluralism endorsed in the section on evidence in general, there are many sources of evidence in theology. Perhaps the first in Christian theology were the experiences of those who witnessed the life of Christ. The authors of the Christian scriptures rarely (if ever) formally engage in theological reflection, but there is theological content. And some of the earliest Christian theology, concerning the nature of Jesus the Christ, took as its starting point the reports recorded in scripture of those experiences. Furthermore, Christians continued to have experiences of the risen Jesus long after the Ascension. These experiences also constitute evidence in some sense, though how they do so will be affected by what other sources of evidence an ecclesial tradition admits.

In keeping with the notion of theology as the quest to understand the truth about God, there will be two sources of evidence for theology taken broadly: the 'book of the world' and the 'book of the Word'; that is, what can be known from nature itself to all who inhabit it, and what has been given in more direct and personal ways (note I say 'more' direct and personal because natural revelation is somewhat direct and somewhat personal). The former is called 'general revelation' because it is cast broadly to all humans. As the psalmist says, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament displays his handiwork. Night by night, they pour forth speech’ (Ps. 19). It is also called ‘natural revelation’ because it comes largely from nature, though we must include human nature in this for it to be an accurate term. The latter is called ‘special revelation’ both because it is more limited in whom it initially addresses—selected communities of persons—and because it tends to be more specific in its content. For example, it tells us not just that there is an infinite God who creates and sustains the world, but that he has certain plans and instructions for us. Corresponding to these two sources of evidence from God about God, there arise two branches of theology, called ‘natural’ theology and sacred theology. (Both what are today called ‘systematic theology’ and ‘biblical theology’ can fit into the category of ‘sacred theology’.)

## Natural Theology

Natural theology is built on natural revelation. Natural revelation constitutes the evidence base for natural theology. Sometimes, natural theology is described as what can be known about God ‘by reason alone’. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with the manner of speech:

> ‘What do you want on your pizza?’
> ‘Just pepperoni.’
> ‘Really, not even cheese?’

The interrogator is playing games. It is well understood what is taken for granted in the realm of pizza toppings. And it should be understood that the expression ‘by reason alone’ means ‘without special revelation’. Keeping this simple fact in mind would spare a lot of critics of natural theology a lot of time (Moser 2008, 2010: Ch. 3). All knowledge of God is via revelation. But God has chosen to reveal himself in different ways. Aquinas speaks of ‘the natural light of reason’, and Aristotle says ‘reason is a light God has kindled in the soul’. Reason is the organ of evidence. It is that by which we perceive something as evidence in general and as evidencing something in particular. Reason is a gift from God and is itself a witness to God. In this sense, there is no such thing as ‘neutral reason’. That is, reason is ‘tinged with the divine’ in that reason reflects the divine and does not fit into a naturalistic universe (see Hasker 1999: Ch. 1; Plantinga 2000: Ch. 7, IV.B.2; Reppert 2003; Lewis 2009: Chs 3–6). Thus the mere existence of reason is evidence for the existence of God. Furthermore, had God withheld granting certain conceptual abilities, we would not be able to reason to our own existence, much less His. All knowledge is grace; knowledge of God is a great grace. Nevertheless, given that God *has* granted certain conceptual abilities and that He *has* made a world that contains objects that point to Him (all created objects point to a creator, but some contexts make it more clear than others), natural theology is a natural outgrowth of natural revelation.

## Sacred Theology

We can do no better here than to begin with three passages from Aquinas:

> It was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God besides philosophical science built up by human reason.
>
> (*ST* I q.1 a.1)

> There are some [sciences] that proceed from principles known by the light of a higher science: thus the science of perspective proceeds from principles established by geometry, and music from principles established by arithmetic. So it is that sacred doctrine is a science because it proceeds from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed. Hence, just as the musician accepts on authority the principles taught him by the mathematician, so sacred science is established on principles revealed by God.
>
> (*ST* I q.1 a.2)

> Sciences are differentiated according to the various means through which knowledge is obtained. For the astronomer and the physicist both may prove the same conclusion: that the earth, for instance, is round: the astronomer by means of mathematics (i.e. abstracting from matter), but the physicist by means of matter itself. Hence there is no reason why those things which may be learned from philosophical science, so far as they can be known by natural reason, may not also be taught us by another science so far as they fall within revelation. Hence theology included in sacred doctrine differs in kind from that theology which is part of philosophy.
>
> (*ST* I q.1 a.1 ad 2)

The gist from these quotes seems twofold. First, sacred theology takes as its starting point not some item of general (or 'natural') revelation, as in natural theology, but, rather, a more specific kind of revelation, especially in sacred scripture. Second, some of the things that can be known, starting with only general revelation, are contained in special revelation for the benefit of humans. Notice that ecclesial differences will affect not only what items count as evidence but what *kind* of items count. In certain forms of late Protestantism, the only admissible form of evidence is the 'plain sense' of scripture. In Catholicism, it will include the statements of all the Doctors of the Church and, in varying weights, fathers of the church, prominent theologians, and papal writings. This difference in practice makes it difficult for the members of different communities to conduct reasonable disagreements. Appeal will need to be made to fine details of shared bodies of evidence, for example assessing scriptural evidence for the relative roles of scripture and episcopal authority in the early church as well as to broader, shared sources of evidence from history. All successful dialogue requires cooperation, but there is no reason in principle why common ground cannot be found from which to argue.

# THE USE OF FORMAL METHODS IN THEOLOGY

## Philosophical Theology and Analytic Theology

One of the main preoccupations of philosophical theology, and its principle species analytic theology, concerns the nature of God. In the investigation of the nature of God, there are at least three different kinds of things that can be used as evidence. First, there is what is said in the scriptures. Some ways of conceiving God are inconsistent with scripture. Yet this is not a simple matter, for theological reflection provides evidence for which parts of scripture are to be taken at face value and which are not, thus giving us another category of evidence: theological reflection. Therefore, the scriptures must be read theologically. For example, when the Hebrew scriptures portray God as an angry demiurge who makes mistakes, and even admits it, theological reflection shows that this cannot be taken at face value. Yet a major theme in scripture like God's willingness to receive the repentant sinner makes conceptions of God as unresponsive to repentance untenable. And of course the scriptures themselves are responses to the experiences of the early disciples. These experiences support some theological conclusions and not others, and thus we have a third category of evidence for the theologian (for more on what kinds of evidence there could be and how they could support theological propositions, see Feldman and Conee 2008; Dougherty 2011c; Byerly 2012.)

## Natural Theology

### *'Mathematical Logic'*

From antiquity, but most notably in the medieval philosophers Augustine, Anselm, Maimonides, Aquinas, Al-Ghazali, and Scotus, natural theology has consisted in cataloguing what can be known about God using as evidence only what is supplied apart from special revelation in the scriptures; that is, from general revelation, often called 'natural' revelation. What can be known from this is thus called 'natural' theology (as opposed to 'sacred' theology, which draws heavily on sacred scripture). We shall take Aquinas as our prime example.

Sometimes, when I teach Introduction to Logic, I use as my first text the *Summa Theologiae* of Saint Thomas Aquinas. The reason is that in that work (as in many others, especially the *Summa Contra Gentiles*) almost every question treated involves the defence of the answer being given with an argument put in the form of an Aristotelian syllogism; a fairly formalized system of logic known to and built upon by medieval logicians. Were there space to do it, it would be worth discussing just how formalized the medieval system of syllogistic logic was; though it did not involve as much use of variables as in algebra, it is now usefully taught using them.

Aristotle was aware of and the medieval logicians expanded upon (following up great work by Stoic logicians) principles of what is now called 'modal logic'. For example, Aristotle said that the best way to determine that something was possible was to show that it was actual. So actuality entails possibility. And Aquinas was aware of issues pertaining to how possibility claims of conditionals were ambiguous. For example, he considers the claim:

> (N) 'Everything God knows is going to happen necessarily will happen.'

He notes that there are two readings of this:

> (N1) Necessarily: (If God knows that something will happen, then that something will happen).
>
> (N2) If God knows that something will happen, then that thing could not have failed to happen.

The first is called 'necessity of consequence' the latter 'necessity of consequent'. (N1) only says that a certain conditional is true no matter what. (N2) says of the item in the consequent of the conditional that it absolutely could not have failed to occur. (N1) is consistent with saying the thing that happens could have not happened, (N2) is not consistent with that. There were numerous such principles known in antiquity and the Middle Ages. The main breakthrough of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with regard to deductive logic—both modalized and non-modalized—was, in essence, the discovery of how to axiomatize logic in such a way that the miscellany of known principles could be deduced from the axioms as theorems. In this respect, it borrowed a page from geometry which, since Euclid, had been highly structured (though Euclidian geometry had been through many phases of refinement since Euclid). It was these kinds of achievements that gave rise to the term 'mathematical logic'. But systematic rigour comes in degrees, and so the use of formal modal logic in, say, Alvin Plantinga's exposition and defence of a version of Anselm's ontological argument differs only by degrees, and not in kind, from Anselm's own use of Aristotle.

## *The Probability Calculus*

A highly mathematical form of probabilistic reasoning—the probability calculus—came earlier than that of deductive reasoning (originating in the seventeenth-century correspondence between Pascal and Fermat), but its development was more uneven. It went almost entirely unformalized in antiquity and was known only in fragments in the Middle Ages. However, even in the darkest part of the Middle Ages (the later part of which I personally consider on par with the flowering of ancient Greece and the best parts of the Enlightenment), there arose 'the world's first quantitative theory of probability' (Franklin 2001: 14). It states that at least seventy-two witnesses are required to condemn a bishop, forty-four for cardinals, and so on down to only seven witnesses to condemn a subdeacon.

The idea, presumably, is that by the time one is entrusted with various levels of responsibility, one has demonstrated a certain degree of trustworthiness (on average, and this was no doubt abused as are all such procedural norms). And since numbers are used, one can calculate the exact prima facie credence of a bishop relative to a cardinal: 72:44, or a little over 62 per cent more credible. This was apparently an actual standard used in early medieval criminal law, which tended to follow established Roman common law.

From these humble beginnings, the theory of legal evidence as well as the theory of evidence in medicine grew by fits and starts, getting a major boost from combinometrics pioneered by alchemists. A major breakthrough came when the Reverend Thomas Bayes proved a theorem (or a version of a theorem) that would come to be incredibly important in fields as diverse as medical diagnostics, computer science, and engineering. So when Richard Swinburne, say, applies Bayes's theorem in assessing the force of evidence for and against the existence of God, he is merely standing at one end of a continuum stretching far back in history and in continuity with medicine and law, which, as many readers will know, were, along with theology, the only three disciplines in which the medieval university granted a doctorate degree. All three disciplines are ordered to human flourishing; all have a paradigmatically cognitive mode; all use reasoning, methods, and principles of various degrees of formality; and each stands at a point in history which is the culmination of an ancient train of thought. These methods may be applied well or poorly—that is for those who know the methods well to decide—but there can be no objection in principle to their application to theology that is not mere bigotry and intellectual chauvinism.

## Conclusion

Theology is a science: it is a truth-seeking endeavour in which those who pursue it move from the evidence they are given—which includes human experiences and truths revealed in nature and to the church—to conclusions about God (with varying degrees of confidence). Theology is also like natural science (and literary studies and history and medicine and law) in the way it proceeds forward on its mission from that evidence: though there is a certain amount of a priori reasoning, for the most part theologians seek to tell a story that resonates well with the evidence, incorporating it into a larger, compelling story.

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### CHAPTER 16

# FOUNDATIONALISM

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FOUNDATIONALISM is a much misunderstood position in epistemology. It is often criticized for certain excesses, despite the fact that these execesses are actually not a part of foundationalism itself but are, instead, unnecessary additions that have on occasion been combined with it. Although foundationalism takes an important and illuminating stand on the structure of knowledge and rationality, its essential ingredients are rather minimal. When properly understood, its main tenets are virtually undeniable.

The best way to get at the heart of foundationalism is to take Aristotle as our guide, focusing on his famous regress argument in *Posterior Analytics* I, 3. The first main section of this chapter will unpack that argument, first with a quick overview and then with a more careful presentation and defence. With that account of foundationalism on the table, the next main section will address some objections to foundationalism, both those based on misconceptions and those that resist its core theses. The third main section will consider how foundationalism bears on the epistemology of theology.

## EXPLAINING AND DEFENDING FOUNDATIONALISM

### Foundationalism Made Easy

As noted above, the starting point for understanding foundationalism is Aristotle's regress argument, which runs as follows. Either all epistemic justification for beliefs depends on inference from another belief (i.e. from a reason) or not. If it requires inference from another belief, then that other belief must itself be a justified belief (because a belief cannot become justified by inference from an unjustified belief). But if all justified belief requires inference from another justified belief, then either justification can arise via an infinite chain of reasoning or it can arise via a circular chain of reasoning, or justified belief is impossible. Unfortunately, each of those three options is quite implausible: clearly there can be justified beliefs, even though justified beliefs cannot be the product of an infinite chain of reasoning or a circular chain of reasoning. We must, therefore, reject the view that led to these three options (the view that all justification depends on inference from another belief—i.e. from a reason) and conclude that a belief can be justified even if it is not inferred from another belief. This argument can be used as the basis for defining foundationalism as follows: *it is the view that the premises and conclusion of the regress argument are true*.

The regress argument supports the conclusion that there are two different ways in which a belief can be justified: by being inferred from another belief and without being inferred from another belief. A belief that is not inferred from another belief is called a 'basic belief'. A basic belief that is in some way epistemically appropriate (e.g. justified or rational or an instance of knowledge) is called a 'properly basic belief'. So foundationalism says that, in addition to inferentially justified beliefs, there can be properly basic beliefs. This distinction, together with the regress argument, provides further insight into the nature of foundationalism by helping us to see that all foundationalist epistemic principles will fit the following generic format:

> *Generic Foundationalist Epistemic Principle*: A belief has positive epistemic status E if and only if *either*:

(i) it is not inferred from another belief and it satisfies conditions C; *or*
(ii) it is inferred in way W from another belief with positive epistemic status E.

There are three schematic letters in this generic foundationalist epistemic principle. The first, E, takes as substitution instances various kinds of positive epistemic status: one can be a foundationalist about epistemic justification, rationality, knowledge, or warrant, and these epistemic properties can themselves be understood in different ways. I will focus mostly on justification. The second schematic letter, C, refers to the *conditions of proper basicality*—that is, the conditions under which a basic (or noninferential) belief counts as properly basic. Some think that a belief is properly basic if and only if it is psychologically certain or adequately supported by nondoxastic evidence (i.e. evidence in the form of conscious mental states that are not beliefs); others propose, as conditions of proper basicality, that the belief is reliably formed or produced by properly functioning cognitive faculties. These differences regarding the conditions of proper basicality are the basis for some of the main distinctions between different kinds of foundationalism. The third schematic letter, W, refers to the different ways one belief can be inferred from another: some versions of foundationalism require that inferential beliefs be deduced with certainty if they are to be justified; others allow, in addition, that justification can arise via inductive inference from a representative sample or abductive inference to the best explanation.

Both the definition of foundationalism and the generic formulation of a foundationalist epistemic principle are motivated and inspired by Aristotle's regress argument.

They capture the main ingredients of foundationalism and help us to see the common core to the many different versions of the view.

## Foundationalism Made Precise

Aristotle's regress argument for foundationalism focused on knowledge or understanding, but other versions of the argument have focused on rationality, justification, or warrant. From Aristotle onwards, the regress argument has tended to emphasize actual beliefs and the epistemic goodness they can have by means of actual inference or in the absence thereof. For this reason, it is natural to focus not on propositional justification (the justification a proposition has for a person in virtue of that person's evidence supporting that proposition, whether or not the person believes the proposition) but rather on doxastic justification (the justification a belief has in virtue of being based on the evidence that supports it). Thus, when I use the term 'justification', I will be speaking of doxastic justification rather than propositional justification.

To capture the core of the regress argument and related philosophical puzzles, it will be helpful to have before our minds the following six views:

PB: A belief can be justified even if it is not inferred from (based on) a belief (i.e. there can be properly basic beliefs).

JJ: A belief can be justified only if it is inferred from (based on) a *justified* belief (i.e. all justification requires prior justification).

UF: A belief can be justified even if the belief(s) from which it is inferred (on which it is based) is/are not justified (i.e. a belief can be justified via an inference chain terminating in an unjustified belief—what might be called an 'unjustified foundation').

CR: A belief can be justified via a circular inference chain (i.e. justification can arise via circular reasoning).

IR: A belief can be justified via an infinitely long non-repeating inference chain (i.e. justification can arise via infinite reasoning).

RS: There can be no justified belief (i.e. radical scepticism is true).

Now consider two *uncontroversial* theses, about how these six views are related:[1]

T1: If

~PB: a belief can be justified only if it is inferred from (based on) a belief,

then either

JJ: a belief can be justified only if it is inferred from (based on) a *justified* belief,

or

UF: a belief can be justified even if the belief(s) from which it is inferred (on which it is based) is/are not justified.

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[1] The symbol '~' means 'not'. So '~P' means 'not-P'.

T2: If JJ, then either
  CR: a belief can be justified via a circular inference chain,
  or
  IR: a belief can be justified via an infinitely long non-repeating inference chain,
  or
  RS: there can be no justified belief.

The following argument can be constructed on the basis of these two uncontroversial theses:

T1: If ~PB, then either JJ or UF.
T2: If JJ, then either CR, IR, or RS.
T3: Therefore, if ~PB, then either UF, CR, IR, or RS.

T3 captures the core uncontroversial thesis behind the regress argument for foundationalism.

Notice that T3 can be used as an initial premise in more than one argument. Consider, for example, these two:

*Regress argument for foundationalism*

1. T3: If ~PB, then either UF, CR, IR, or RS.
2. ~UF
3. ~CR
4. ~IR
5. ~RS
6. Therefore, PB.

*Argument for radical scepticism*

1. T3: If ~PB, then either UF, CR, IR, or RS.
2. ~UF
3. ~CR
4. ~IR
5. ~PB
6. Therefore, RS.

These two arguments share their first four premises but differ greatly in their conclusions. As already noted, the first is reminiscent of Aristotle's regress argument for foundationalism in the *Posterior Analytics* (I, 3). The second is similar to a sceptical argument found in Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Bk I, Ch. XV).

A helpful way to view both of these arguments is to consider this inconsistent set of claims:

*The Inconsistent Set*: {~PB, ~UF, ~CR, ~IR, ~RS}.

T3 says that this set is inconsistent—that if the set member listed first is true, then at least one of the other members is false. Given that it's an inconsistent set, at least one of its members is false. The regress argument for foundationalism takes it that each of the last four members is more plausible than the first; so it concludes that the first member is false (i.e. PB is true). The argument for radical scepticism takes it that each of the first four members is more plausible than the last; so it concludes that the last member is false (i.e. RS is true). Other similar arguments could be formulated with T3 as a starting point. For example, one might think that the second-last member is the least plausible and conclude, on the basis of accepting each of the other four as more plausible and true, that IR is true. In short, what we have here is a classic example of a philosophical puzzle: each member of an inconsistent set of claims has at least some initial plausibility to it, and so we are forced, it seems, to reject at least one seemingly plausible claim.

There are five standard ways to respond to this puzzle, each of which denies just one member of the Inconsistent Set:

> *Foundationalism*: PB is true and UF, CR, IR, and RS are false (i.e. the premises and conclusion of the regress argument are true.)
>
> *The 'unjustified foundations' view*: UF is true and PB, CR, IR, and RS are false.
>
> *Linear coherentism*: CR is true and PB, UF, IR, and RS are false.
>
> *Infinitism*: IR is true and PB, UF, CR, and RS are false.
>
> *Radical scepticism*: RS is true and PB, UF, CR, and IR are false.

These are not the only five ways to deal with the Inconsistent Set. But they are the natural ones to focus on because, by denying only one member of the set, each departs *minimally* from the starting point of thinking that each member of the set is at least somewhat plausible. So which of these five ways of resolving this philosophical puzzle is best?

## Foundationalism Defended

In the view of most philosophers throughout history who have thought about this puzzle, foundationalism is hands-down the best solution to the puzzle highlighted by T3. Even if foundationalism has some initial implausibility, that implausibility pales in comparison to the implausibility of the other four options. Moreover, careful reflection on foundationalism and its allegedly worrisome features enables us to see that whatever minor initial implausibility it has disappears upon further examination.

Let us briefly rehearse why UF, CR, IR, and RS seem so implausible. Consider first UF, the signature claim of the 'unjustified foundations' view. Suppose you have two beliefs, B1 and B2, both of which are not justified at all and neither of which is based on any reasons or evidence. And suppose also that B2 implies B1, though at first you did not realize this. Can B1 become justified to some degree *solely* in virtue of your later inferring it from the still unjustified belief B2, which you come to realize implies it? It seems clear that the answer is 'no'. Inference from reasons does not yield any justification if those reasons have nothing going for them, epistemically speaking.

A similar problem afflicts CR, which endorses circular reasoning. Suppose, once again, that you have two beliefs, B1 and B2, both of which are not justified at all and neither of which is based on any reason or evidence. This time suppose that each view implies the other view (e.g. suppose B1 is that figure X is a closed-plane figure with three sides, and B2 is that figure X is a closed-plane figure with three angles). Can B1 and B2 become justified to some degree *solely* in virtue of your later inferring B1 from B2 and B2 from B1? Again, it seems clear that the answer is 'no' and for the same sort of reason: inference from reasons does not yield any justification if those reasons do not already have something going for them, epistemically speaking. (See Plantinga 1993: 74–8 for more on the problematic nature of circular reasoning.)

Consider next IR, which says that a belief can be justified via an infinite non-repeating chain of reasoning. The problem with IR can be seen by comparing it with the view that all value is instrumental value. Something is *instrumentally* valuable if it is useful for obtaining something else that is valuable; something is valuable *in itself* if it is valuable for its own sake (e.g. it is plausible to think that friendship is valuable in itself whereas chemotherapy is merely instrumentally valuable). It seems impossible for all value to be instrumental value, always dependent on the value of some other thing, with nothing being valuable in itself. If all value were instrumental, there could not be any value on which instrumental value ultimately depends. There would instead be only an unending series of promissory notes never fulfilled; value would be 'infinitely deferred, never achieved' (to adapt a phrase Schaffer 2010 uses in another context). In the same way, it seems impossible for the justification of every belief to be dependent on the justification of some other belief (in a non-repeating inference chain), with no belief having any degree of justification that is not dependent on the justification of some other belief. As noted above, a belief is not justified via inference from another belief unless that other belief is justified. So being inferred from a belief generates no justification in itself. In order to get justification into the inference chain, there must be some source of justification apart from mere inference. And even if, *per impossibile*, a belief could be justified via an infinite non-repeating chain of reasoning, none of *our* beliefs is in fact based on an infinite non-repeating chain of reasoning, so none of our beliefs is justified in this way.

Let us turn, finally, to RS, the view that there can be no justified belief. Considered just on its own, RS is far more implausible than the view that it is possible for there to be justified belief. One would need an extremely powerful argument for the conclusion that justified belief is impossible. (And even then, one would not want to conclude that one is *justified* in thinking that justified belief is impossible. RS is either false or no one is justified in believing it.) But, the main argument for that conclusion—the argument for radical scepticism given above—has at least one premise (i.e. ~PB) that is less plausible than the view to which the argument is objecting, namely, that justified belief is possible.

The considerations just rehearsed go a long way towards explaining why almost everyone rejects UF, CR, IR, and RS. Each of those four views is implausible in the extreme. As for PB, many people think it is not the least bit implausible. Some might find it a little bit tempting to think, initially, that a belief is justified only if it is based on a reason and that a reason must be a belief. But once you see that that conjunction implies the falsity of PB and you have before your mind T3 and the entire Inconsistent Set, {~PB, ~UF, ~CR, ~IR, ~RS}, you see that if you accept that PB is false, you have to accept either UF, CR, IR, or RS. In light of that, it is natural and sensible to have serious misgivings about denying PB. Moreover, once you consider the view that a belief can be justified by being based on something other than a belief (e.g. an a priori mathematical seeming or an experience of pain), PB seems downright plausible. Nothing similar happens with further reflection on UF, CR, IR, or RS. There is nothing that makes them seem plausible in the way PB seems plausible.

Why then do some object to foundationalism? Does denying PB really force you to accept UF, CR, IR, or RS? Yes, given T3, which seems uncontroversial. Are UF, CR, IR, and RS really that implausible? Yes, for the reasons given in the preceding paragraphs. Does endorsement of PB and rejection of UF, CR, IR, and RS really commit one to foundationalism? Yes, given the definition of foundationalism provided above in terms of Aristotle's regress argument. Is that really a good definition of foundationalism? Again, yes. That regress argument has long been viewed as the main reason to endorse foundationalism. Why, then, do some object to foundationalism? This is a question I will take up in the next section.

## Objections to Foundationalism

### Problems with Cartesian Foundationalism

Many objections to foundationalism fail to hit their intended target. Specific versions of foundationalism endorse generic foundationalism (saying that the premises and the conclusion of the regress argument are true) and add to that some claim detachable from it, such as a claim about what is required for a belief to be properly basic. Perhaps the most common misguided objections to foundationalism are those that object to Cartesian foundationalism, which endorses the following epistemic principle:

*Cartesian epistemic principle (CEP)*: A belief is justified if and only if either:

(i) it is a noninferential belief produced with indubitable certainty via introspection or a priori intuition or clear memory; or

(ii) it is deduced with indubitable certainty from a justified belief.

Cartesian foundationalism endorses not only CEP but also the claim that our perceptual beliefs can be justified inferentially, via arguments that meet the standards imposed by CEP. Objections to Cartesian foundationalism typically complain that (a) CEP has the unpalatable consequence of external-world scepticism, given that our perceptual beliefs do not satisfy the standards specified in CEP; or (b) CEP has the 'self-referential' problem of implying that belief in CEP is itself unjustified, given that that belief fails to satisfy CEP-imposed requirements. Central to both of these objections is the thought that it is highly implausible to think CEP is true in requiring, for justification, that our beliefs are indubitable (or incorrigible or infallible), or that they are deduced with absolute certainty from such beliefs. But these objections to Cartesian foundationalism need not be viewed as in any way threatening to generic foundationalism. Objecting to one species of foundationalism does not show that foundationalism itself is mistaken, especially when the species in question is as unpopular as Cartesian foundationalism is among contemporary foundationalists.

## Defences of Alleged Alternatives to Foundationalism

The view most commonly contrasted with foundationalism is coherentism. If we think of coherentism as *linear* coherentism—the view that CR is true and that PB, UF, IR, and RS are false—then we have a clear competitor to foundationalism. But it is difficult to find a serious defender of CR's affirmation of circular reasoning. Moreover, there are versions of coherentism that are not competitors to foundationalism. Consider the holistic coherentist view that *a person's belief is justified if and only if it coheres with that person's other beliefs*. This is a kind of coherentism, even though it includes no endorsement of circular reasoning. But notice that a holistic coherentist of this sort could endorse a version of foundationalism according to which cohering with one's other beliefs is what makes a belief *noninferentially* justified. This position is just a foundationalist one with an unusual proposal for a condition on proper basicality. (See BonJour 1985: 89–93 on the distinction between linear and holistic coherentism. Sosa 1980, Plantinga 1993: Ch. 4, and Klein 1999 and 2000 argue that holistic coherentism is a version of foundationalism).

Susan Haack defends foundherentism, which she portrays as an alternative to both coherentism and foundationalism. And yet she agrees that there could be no inferential justification for any of our beliefs unless there were first some noninferential justification that our beliefs obtained independently of their being based on other beliefs. As she puts it, 'there is no danger of an infinite regress … [because] with empirical justification eventually we reach experiential evidence' (Haack 1999: 289). It is true that she emphasizes that a belief with noninferential justification can become more justified if inferential justification is added to it. But the bottom line is that she accepts PB and rejects UF, CR, IR, and RS, which is enough to make her a foundationalist. Clearly, defending either coherentism or foundherentism does not, in itself, amount to an objection to foundationalism.

## Can Justification Come from Experience?

Another common objection to foundationalism (see Sellars 1963; Rorty 1979: 173–92; and Davidson 1986) takes a stand against experiential justification by claiming that:

> EJ: A belief cannot be justified in virtue of being properly based on an experience.

Note that EJ is a weaker claim than the claim that all justification requires prior justification:

> JJ: A belief cannot be justified except by being based on another justified belief.

If JJ is true, then so is EJ. But, as Kvanvig (1995) makes clear, EJ can be true even if JJ is false. For although JJ (which conflicts with PB) is opposed to generic foundationalism, EJ is not, because it is compatible with the view that PB is true and that UF, CR, IR, and RS are false (to say belief is not justified in virtue of being based on an experience is not to say it cannot be noninferentially justified). Hence, one cannot object to foundationalism simply by defending EJ. Thus, even if Kvanvig (1995) is right in thinking that coherentism can be made more plausible if it endorses EJ rather than JJ, he's mistaken in thinking (1995: 263–4) that the truth of EJ would show that foundationalism is false. Nevertheless, because many foundationalists do think that beliefs can be noninferentially justified in virtue of being properly based on sensory experience, it is worth considering, if only briefly, what may be said on behalf of EJ.

There are two main arguments in support of EJ. First, causation is not justification, so the fact that a belief is caused by an experience (because it is based on it, and the basing relation is causal) 'does not show how or why the belief is justified' (Davidson 1986: 311). All of this sounds right, but it does not support EJ. Opponents of EJ say that a belief can be justified in virtue of being *properly based* on an experience, not merely in virtue of being caused by it; and properly basing a belief on an experience requires more than that belief being caused by that experience. Although there is no generally accepted account of the basing relation, it is widely acknowledged that basing requires more than causation, which is enough to show that this argument for EJ is inadequate. In addition, more is required for *proper* basing than for mere basing. There are, of course different accounts of proper basing on an experience: some think such basing requires that a belief epistemically fits the evidence consisting of the experience on which the belief is based; some think such basing requires that the belief is a properly functioning (i.e. cognitively healthy) response to that experience; and others say such basing requires that the experience is a reliable indicator of the belief's truth. But the main point is that this first argument for EJ fails insofar as it shows only that mere causation by experience is insufficient for justification, not that proper basing on such experience is insufficient for justification. (For critical discussion of Davidson's version of this argument, see Howard-Snyder 2002: S. 1; for an examination of Rorty's and, indirectly, of Sellars' defence of this argument, see Triplett 1987.)

The other main argument for EJ claims that experience (e.g. sensory experience) lacks propositional content and, for this reason, it cannot give justification to a belief properly based on it. But why think that all experience lacks propositional content? Seemings or appearances are, arguably, experiences and they have propositional content. And many philosophers (e.g. Byrne 2009 and Seigel 2010) think that sensory experience has propositional content. But even if we focus solely on sensory experience and assume that it does not have propositional content, why think this implies that a belief can't be justified in virtue of being properly based on it? The idea seems to be that only propositions can stand in logical relations of entailment or probabilistic relations of confirmation. Consequently, beliefs can support other beliefs because the content of one can entail or probabilify the content of another. And if sensory experience has no propositional content, it cannot in this way support a belief; and, hence, a belief cannot be justified in virtue of its being based on a sensory experience. That's the thinking behind this defence of EJ.

But why think one mental state can evidentially support another only if they both have propositional contents that stand in these logical or probabilistic relations? Suppose that a belief is justified if it is an epistemically fitting response to the evidence on which it is based; and suppose that some belief B is, of necessity, an epistemically fitting response to a particular sensory experience E (which has no propositional content). Or suppose that a belief is justified if it is a properly functioning response to the evidence on which it is based; and suppose that, for some person, B is such a response to sensory experience E (which, again, has no propositional content). In either scenario, a belief would be justified in virtue of being based on an experience, despite the fact that the experience has no propositional content. In one case it is because justification depends on a belief's fitting the experiential evidence (of necessity); in the other it is because justification depends on the belief's being formed in accordance with proper function for the believer in question. In neither case does justification depend on logical or probabilistic relations between the propositional contents of the beliefs and the mental states on which they are based. Without a good reason to reject all such accounts of justification, defenders of this argument for EJ have not made their case (for further discussion of this argument, see Howard-Snyder 2002: Section 2.1.).

## Does Justification Require Other Justified Beliefs?

The most important objections to foundationalism—because they manage to target foundationalism itself—defend JJ. One such argument (BonJour 1985: 30–2), runs as follows:

*First argument for JJ*

1. A belief is justified (or reasonable) only if it is based on a good reason.
2. A belief is based on a good reason only if it is based on another justified belief.

Therefore, JJ: a belief can't be justified except by being based on another justified belief.

The problem is that if we endorse premise 2, thinking of reasons as beliefs (and good reasons as justified beliefs), then it is no longer plausible to endorse the premise 1 claim that a belief is justified only if it is based on a good reason. It is no longer plausible because (a) premise 1 would then imply ~PB, and that, together with T3, entails the implausible claim that either UF, CR, IR, or RS is true; and (b) it's natural and plausible to think that a belief based on an a priori mathematical seeming or an experience of pain can be justified, despite the fact that such beliefs aren't based on other justified beliefs.

Peter Klein (2011: 250) captures one of the most prominent arguments for JJ:

> *Second argument for JJ*
>
> 1. For any allegedly noninferentially justified belief B of any person S, S can be asked what property B has that makes it justified and whether having that property makes B more likely to be true, and S can either answer the question or not.
> 2. If S does not answer the question, then it is arbitrary for S to hold B, in which case B is not justified.
> 3. If S does answer the question, then either (a) S identifies a property B has that makes it justified and says that having that property makes B more likely to be true, or (b) not.
> 4. If (a) then B is an inferential belief, in which case it is not noninferential.
> 5. If (b) then B is not justified.
> 6. Therefore, no allegedly noninferentially justified belief B of any person S is in fact noninferentially justified (i.e. only inferential beliefs can be justified). (from 1–5)
> 7. If a belief is inferentially justified, the belief on which it is based must be justified.
>
> Therefore, JJ: a belief can't be justified except by being based on another justified belief. (from 6–7)

Premises 1 and 3 are uncontroversial. Premise 7 is basically the denial of UF and that denial is extremely plausible, for reasons mentioned in this chapter's first main section. That leaves premises 2, 4, and 5. If even one of those premises is problematic, the argument fails. Unfortunately, all three are problematic.

Premises 2 and 5 say that if the question in premise 1 is not answered or it is answered differently to the way specified in 3(a), then the allegedly justified belief B is not in fact justified. We can see as follows that both premises are mistaken. Jill has a friend Jane who is obsessed with epistemology and likes to ask questions such as 'what makes that belief of yours justified?' and then, if she gets a direct answer, loves to keep asking further questions of the same sort about whatever answer is given. Jill often finds this habit of Jane's rather annoying. Now suppose Jill stubs her toe and starts hopping around on one foot saying, 'ouch, I am in so much pain', and Jane says 'in virtue of what is that belief that you're in pain justified?' And suppose Jill either ignores Jane, refusing to answer her, or answers her *not* by giving the response specified in 3(a) but by telling her to shut up or by saying that it's a question she does not want to discuss. Would that show, as premises 2 and 5 say, that Jill's belief that she is in pain is not justified? Obviously not.

Consider next premise 4. It says that if the question in premise 1 is answered in the way specified in 3(a), the belief is inferential. But that is not true. Even if S agrees that (i) B is justified in virtue of its having some property F and that (ii) B's having F makes it likely to be true, it does not follow that she infers B from these two truths. It is possible for some of a person's beliefs to lend support to another belief of hers, even though she does not infer the latter belief from those other beliefs. For example, Holmes might playfully give Watson the following two clues to solving a crime: (i) it is false that *Albert and Bertha are innocent while Clyde is not*, and (ii) *if Albert is innocent, then if Bertha is innocent, then if Albert is innocent, then so is Clyde*. Watson might believe both clues on the basis of Holmes's testimony without inferring either from the other, even though each supports the other because they are logically equivalent. Another example: suppose I believe both that I'm thinking and that *if I'm thinking, then I exist*; it does not follow that my further belief that I exist is inferred using Descartes's inference 'I think, therefore I am'. So this second argument for JJ fails as well. (For further discussion of these responses to the second argument for JJ, see Howard-Snyder and Coffman 2006: Sections 1 and 2, and Bergmann 2014: Section 5.)

In short, foundationalism (understood as the endorsement of the premises and conclusion of the regress argument) is extremely plausible and the objections to it are either missing their target or they depend on arguments that are flawed in some way (or both).

# Foundationalism and Theology

## Reformed Epistemology and Natural Theology

One of the main distinctions in the epistemology of religious belief is between Reformed epistemology and natural theology. Reformed epistemologists say that belief in God can be justified noninferentially, in the absence of theistic arguments (Reformed epistemology has nothing particularly to do with Protestantism or Calvinism other than the fact that Calvin's advocacy of the view inspired its name; there is no reason why Catholics or even Muslims, Jews, or Hindus could not endorse the view). Natural theologians emphasize that belief in God can be justified inferentially, on the basis of good theistic arguments with widely shared premises. These two positions are compatible. But some thinkers go further and insist that belief in God can be justified *only* noninferentially or that belief in God can be justified *only* inferentially. (This latter view is sometimes called 'evidentialism' or 'theistic evidentialism', but it would perhaps be better to refer to it as *theistic inferentialism*, given that the term 'evidentialism' has other uses in epistemology, referring to a view that allows for noninferentially justified belief (see Conee and Feldman 2004).) But Reformed epistemologists and natural theologians both tend to agree that beliefs can be justified noninferentially and that UF, CR, IR, and RS are false. Reformed epistemology and natural theology are, therefore, two kinds of foundationalist religious epistemology, each with distinctive proposals about which religious beliefs are likely to be properly basic.

Reformed epistemologists take Reid's response to Descartes one step further: Descartes thought that perceptual belief and theistic belief had to be justified inferentially; Reid denied this, insisting that perceptual belief could be justified noninferentially. Reformed epistemologists say the same thing about theistic belief. Just as we have a faculty of perception by which we form justified noninferential perceptual beliefs based on sensory experience, so also we have a *sensus divinitatis* or some sort of belief-forming capacity by which we form justified noninferential belief in God based on theistic seemings (i.e. experiences of its seeming to us that God has certain features or is doing certain things). Alston (1991) and Plantinga (2000) are two of the main proponents of Reformed epistemology. They are both externalists in epistemology (see Plantinga 1993 and Alston 1989), thinking that what matters for justification or warrant is that your beliefs are formed in the right way, not (as internalists insist) that you are *aware* that they are formed in the right way. But Reformed epistemology is compatible with both internalism *and* externalism in epistemology, just as Reidian views on the noninferential justification of perceptual beliefs are compatible with both internalism and externalism (e.g. Pryor 2000 is an internalist who takes perceptual beliefs to be noninferentially justified, Goldman 1979 is an externalist who takes perceptual beliefs to be noninferentially justified, and Tucker 2011 defends an internalist version of Reformed epistemology). Given that Reformed epistemologists think belief in God can be noninferentially justified (or properly basic), they obviously agree with PB. They also tend to agree that UF, CR, IR, and RS are false—for the same reasons that almost everyone else thinks they are false.

Although natural theologians emphasize that belief in God can be justified inferentially via arguments based on widely shared premises, they too incline towards foundationalism, thinking that UF, CR, IR, and RS are false (again, for the same reasons that most people think they are false). Their idea is not that *all* beliefs are justified inferentially. Rather, the thought is that belief in God is like belief in electrons: because both God and electrons are invisible, we are not noninferentially justified in believing in them on the basis of perception; instead, we typically must infer that they exist on the basis of arguments pointing to their existence. The main theistic arguments employed are teleological arguments, cosmological arguments, and moral arguments, but there are others as well. (For discussion of teleological arguments for theism see Manson 2003 and Ratzsch 2013; for cosmological arguments see Reichenbach 2013; for moral arguments see Byrne 2013; for a discussion of other arguments for theism see Plantinga 2007.) What is important for our purposes is that these arguments have premises, which (according to their proponents) are either justified noninferentially or formed inferentially, ultimately via arguments that have premises that are justified noninferentially. Thus, although natural theologians emphasize that belief in God can be justified inferentially, this is compatible with insisting that this justification bottoms out in beliefs that are justified noninferentially. As noted earlier, this is *not* to insist that all justification depends on beliefs that are absolutely certain or are infallibly justified or anything of the sort. What natural theologians are endorsing is generic foundationalism, not Cartesian foundationalism.

## Biblical Studies

The distinction between Reformed epistemology and natural theology is relevant in thinking about different accounts of what is required for rationally believing the teachings of the Bible. (It is no easy matter to determine what the Bible teaches or asserts but I will be assuming that it is at least plausible that the Bible asserts some contested historical claims such as that the exodus and conquest occurred and that Jesus performed miracles and rose from the dead.) Historical biblical criticism (HBC) focuses on what it is reasonable to believe about biblical teaching in light of evidence shared by religious believers and unbelievers alike, evidence such as:

E1: Archaeological evidence and historical research indicating potential conflicts with or potential support for biblical accounts of past events.
E2: Apparent contradictions in the biblical text.
E3: Evidence about human nature pertaining to how likely it is that the human authors of the Bible were accurate in all their claims (given their various limitations and agendas).
E4: Widely shared moral intuitions suggesting that much of what, according to biblical teaching, is approved of or endorsed by God is morally problematic or worse.
E5: Philosophical arguments for the reliability of the Bible and its teachings.

(For a summary of much of the evidence associated with E1–E4, see Sparks 2008; for E5 see e.g. Swinburne 2007). Some proponents of HBC argue that, all things considered, E1–E5 support the conclusion that what the Bible asserts is often false (e.g. the stories of the exodus and conquest, or the miracles of Jesus, including his resurrection). Other more theologically conservative proponents of HBC argue that E1–E5 support the conclusion that what the Bible asserts is always true (including the stories of the exodus and conquest and the miracles of Jesus). Both groups claim to be employing a methodology that is similar to the methodology advocated by natural theologians; that is relying only on arguments from premises shared by believers and unbelievers alike to arrive at conclusions about whether what the Bible teaches is true. (Although each group claims to be doing this, both are accused of failing to rely only on such premises: those who are less theologically conservative are sometimes accused of relying on the controversial assumption that miracles are impossible; those who are more theologically conservative are sometimes accused of being independently committed to the truth of scriptural teaching before they look into the evidence, and of letting that colour their interpretation and assessment of the evidence.)

An alternative account of what is required for justified belief in the teachings or assertions of the Bible is inspired by Reformed epistemology (see Plantinga 2000: Ch. 12 and Evans 1996). On this view, we can know the things the Bible teaches by accepting (in the right way) what it says, without relying on arguments from evidence such as E1–E5. Upon hearing or reading what the Bible asserts, it might seem to a person that the teaching is true; it may also seem to that person that God is teaching the truth in question. On the basis of these seemings, such a person might believe what the Bible teaches and perhaps also that the Bible is God's word and true. According to this account, these seemings are produced by the work of the Holy Spirit and the beliefs based on these seemings are justified. The person who believes the bible's teaching on this basis might acknowledge that much of what the Bible asserts is not strongly supported by E1–E5; the person might even acknowledge that, while not strictly inconsistent with the truth of biblical claims, E1–E5 support the falsity of some of the things the Bible teaches. Nevertheless, the person believes what the Bible says on the basis of the seemings, because the strength of the evidence provided by these seemings outweighs the strength of any counterevidence provided by E1–E5. This is much like what happens if a man framed for a crime believes in his innocence despite the strong evidence, presented in court, for his guilt. Just as the man framed for the crime relies on his memory seemings, despite agreeing that the evidence presented to the jury strongly supports his guilt, so also the person who believes the biblical teaching relies on the seemings that the things asserted in the Bible are true, despite agreeing that E1–E5 support the falsity of at least some of those teachings. And just as the accused man cannot give his memory seemings to the jurors (he can only report them), so also the person who believes the Bible's teachings cannot give others her seemings that the Bible is true. In that sense, the evidence is not shareable. This Reformed epistemologist approach to explaining justified belief in biblical teaching does not deny that the evidence in E1–E5, along with other evidence, is relevant to the reliability of the seemings that the Bible's teachings are true. But the fact that such evidence is relevant to their reliability does not automatically undermine those seemings any more than the fact that the evidence presented in court is relevant to the reliability of the memory seemings of the person framed for the crime automatically undermines that person's memory seemings of her innocence.

Obviously, there are many questions that can be raised about these different accounts of how people could be justified in forming beliefs with regard to biblical teaching. What is relevant for our purposes is that all of these approaches tend to endorse foundationalism. Both the less theologically conservative and the more theologically conservative proponents of the methods of HBC are likely to agree with the foundationalist view that belief in biblical teaching is justified only if the believer has some noninferentially justified beliefs on the basis of which she forms justified beliefs with respect to the evidence (E1–E5) and from which she properly infers that the Bible's teachings are true. Thus, although they differ in their conclusions about the Bible's teachings, both those who are more conservative and those who are less conservative are likely to accept PB and deny UF, CR, IR, and RS. Something similar can be said about those who endorse the Reformed epistemologist approach to explaining how belief in biblical teaching is justified. They differ from the previous two positions insofar as they think belief in the teachings of scripture can be noninferentially justified whereas the proponents of the methods of HBC (whether they are theologically conservative or not) think that belief in biblical assertions can, at best, be justified only inferentially on the basis of evidence such as E1–E5. Nevertheless, those endorsing the Reformed epistemologist approach tend to agree with the foundationalist's acceptance of PB and rejection of UF, CR, IR, and RS. Thus, we have a dispute between different foundationalist epistemologies of scripture, with competing views concerning which beliefs about biblical teaching, if any, are properly basic and which, if any, are inferentially justified. It should, by now, go without saying that none of these three approaches is committed to Cartesian foundationalism, with its requirement of absolutely certain properly basic beliefs and airtight deductions in support of all justified inferential beliefs.

## Post-Foundationalism

In their influential book *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, Grenz and Franke discuss the development of theology in a post-foundationalist world, where 'a growing number of theologians are becoming cognizant of the demise of foundationalism in philosophy' (Grenz and Franke 2001: 46). However, it is simply a mistake to think that philosophers have given up on foundationalism. Grenz and Franke show some signs of recognizing this when they say:

> In its broadest sense, foundationalism is merely the acknowledgement of the seemingly obvious observation that not all beliefs we hold (or assertions we formulate) are on the same level, but that some beliefs (or assertions) anchor others…. Defined in this manner, nearly every thinker is in some sense a foundationalist.
>
> (Grenz and Franke 2001: 29)

Although this does not adequately capture what foundationalism is, they are right to acknowledge how widely held and plausible foundationalism is. But they go on to say:

> In philosophical circles, however, 'foundationalism' refers to a much stronger epistemological stance than is entailed in this observation about how beliefs intersect. At the heart of the foundationalist agenda is the desire to overcome the uncertainty generated by our human liability to error and the inevitable disagreements that follow. Foundationalists are convinced that the only way to solve this problem is to find some means of grounding the entire edifice of human knowledge on invincible certainty.
>
> (Grenz and Franke 2001: 30)

As a characterization of the philosophical perspective on foundationalism, this is simply not true. Descartes may have had such an agenda and perhaps this agenda has been popular at times in the history of philosophy. But since the 1970s at least, it is only a small minority of philosophers who are interested in pursuing this agenda in the Cartesian way. Moreover, the generic term 'foundationalism' as it is used in philosophy has long been detached from this sort of position. As even Grenz and Franke recognize, '[t]his quest for complete certitude is often termed "strong" or "classical foundationalism"', rather than foundationalism proper (30).

But then why speak, so misleadingly, as if foundationalism has been rejected, when it is only the Cartesian version of it that is found wanting? Why speak of going beyond foundationalism or of the need to find alternatives to foundationalism when other non-Cartesian versions of foundationalism are completely acceptable? Why speak of foundationalism's demise when, upon reflection, no alternative to foundationalism seems plausible? Grenz and Franke speak as if theologians are concerned to engage what is going on 'in philosophical circles':

> [A] growing number of theologians are becoming cognizant of the demise of foundationalism in philosophy and are increasingly concerned to explore the implications of this demise for theology. They believe that theology must take seriously the postmodern critique of Enlightenment foundationalism and must capitalize on attempts of philosophers to formulate alternatives. Convinced that the quest to move beyond foundationalism is crucial for theology, they draw insights for their own work from the emerging nonfoundationalist theorists.
>
> (Grenz and Franke 2001: 46)

It's true that Enlightenment (i.e. Cartesian) foundationalism is widely viewed as flawed. But it is simply a mistake to think that philosophers have, for this reason, moved beyond foundationalism to nonfoundationalist views, either rejecting PB or affirming UF, IR, CR, or RS.

The natural response to what I have been saying is to point out that there is an ambiguity in the term 'foundationalism'. It could refer to generic foundationalism, of the sort explained and defended in this chapter, or it can refer to one species of that generic foundationalism, famously espoused by Descartes. And, this response continues, Grenz and Franke and many others are simply objecting to the latter, not the former. That may be so, and perhaps that is somewhat understandable, given that the term has too often been used in that latter more narrow sense. But the problem is that this leads to confusion when, as happens repeatedly, people think that rejecting the narrow version of foundationalism requires the adoption of alternatives to generic foundationalism. It would be far more helpful if these objectors would simply say that Descartes's agenda was mistaken, but Aristotle's insight was right: there are no plausible alternatives to foundationalism even though it seems to be a good idea to reject Descartes's version of it. It is Aristotle, not Descartes, who is the father of foundationalism; Descartes is merely the founder of one species of it, based on what many now think was a misguided quest for certainty. Alleged alternatives to foundationalism are really just non-Cartesian versions of it. Being careful to emphasize this explicitly would go a long way towards avoiding further error and confusion.

## Future Research in the Epistemology of Theology

One area in which future work would be beneficial is the anti-foundationalist literature within theology. Two things would be involved here. First, it is important to expose and correct alleged objections to foundationalism that target only specific (often currently unpopular) versions of it. Of particular interest here are the cases where authors conclude that generic foundationalism is false on the grounds that Cartesian foundationalism is mistaken. Second, it is important to understand and preserve the valuable insights and arguments that have been shrouded in anti-foundationalist rhetoric. The anti-foundationalism itself is typically misguided—either attacking only a Cartesian view that very few hold today or jumping to the unsupported conclusion that generic foundationalism, one of the most plausible and widely held views in the history of philosophy, is false. But that does not mean there is nothing of value, nothing worth defending, in the anti-foundationalist literature. Clarifying and developing what that valuable remaining core is would be a worthwhile endeavour.

There are other investigative possibilities that do not challenge or defend generic foundationalism but focus instead on different versions of it and their disagreements about which beliefs are or can be properly basic. For example, there are several promising avenues for future research in connection with Reformed epistemology and natural theology. One is the exploration of which theological and religious beliefs are plausibly viewed as noninferentially justified (or properly basic) and what sorts of positive epistemic status, besides epistemic justification, noninferential theological beliefs might have. There are other intriguing questions in the same neighbourhood. For example, if Reformed epistemologists are right that there is noninferentially justified religious belief in the existence of God (or even in the teachings of the Bible), what is the value and role of natural theology (or HBC)? Can they be developed or reformulated in conjunction with the Reformed epistemologists' insights? Some fine work has already been done on these latter topics by philosophers of religion (see Evans 2010; Plantinga 2011: Ch. 8; and Ratzsch 2003), but further work bringing theological expertise to bear on these questions would be valuable.

In connection with biblical studies, the Reformed epistemologists' approach, with its nonstandard suggestion about what belongs in the 'foundations' when doing serious scholarly work on scripture, seems to be underdeveloped. Biblical scholars have not taken kindly to this approach, whose advocates have been, for the most part, philosophers (defences of the Reformed epistemologists' approach by philosophers can be found in Plantinga 2000: Ch. 12, and Evans 1996; with criticisms, by philosophers, of HBC appearing in work by Alston 2003; Stump 1989 and 1994; and van Inwagen 1993). If this approach is to bear any fruit, what is required is that those with expertise in the field of biblical studies (and other fields within theology) understand it better and explore how it might be developed in ways that are friendly to and respectful of the insights, tools, and results of decades of extremely valuable research in biblical criticism. It is true that there already is some fine work by biblical scholars on this topic—see Brinks (2013) and some of the papers in Bartholomew et al. (2003). But much more work is needed, including continued engagement with and input from philosophers. Given how untrodden this ground is in biblical studies and theology, the opportunities for exciting and beneficial research in this area are legion.

## Acknowledgements

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# CHAPTER 17

# REALISM AND ANTI-REALISM

CHRISTOPHER J. INSOLE

The desire to draw a distinction between realism and anti-realism arises in response to a question, or anxiety, in a particular area. To reflect this motivation, this chapter tracks different ways of drawing the distinction, by the framing of a question in each case. One of the more important and edifying things that the distinction can do for us is to enable us to ask the right sort of question about a particular area of interest, rather than providing a priori answers across the board. Instead of asking whether a thinker, world view, or movement is 'realist' or 'anti-realist', it is more illuminating to ask whether a thinker or movement is realist or anti-realist, on a particular apt-for-purpose construal of this distinction, about a specified range of statements, when one has a particular set of interests.

Although there are complex interrelationships, and further subtleties and subdivisions, approaches to the realism/anti-realism distinction characteristically fall into four broad categories: the cognitivist (which ask whether religious utterances are making truth claims at all, rather than expressing an attitude, or prescribing a rule); the ontological (which focus on 'mind-independence'); the epistemological (which attend to the relationship between the truth and our beliefs about the truth); and the semantic (which attend to the conditions under which statements can be meaningfully asserted). I take each of these in turn, always with a view to their application in theological contexts. In the account that follows, I am indebted to existing surveys, provided by Brock and Mares (2007), Trigg (2010), and Craig (2012).

## COGNITIVIST CONSTRUALS

Some philosophers have wanted to deny that religious utterances such as 'God exists' are really attempting to be descriptive at all. Where the utterance is not treated as descriptive, it is typically regarded in one of two ways: either as expressive of an attitude, along the lines of 'I like Mozart', or 'Boo to murder!'; or as prescriptively setting a rule for how to go on, along the lines of 'the Bishop in chess moves diagonally across the board', or 'drive on the left'. Such expressions or prescriptions cannot be said to be true or false, as they are not attempted descriptions. Although expressivism and prescriptivism are different positions, they are both sometimes called 'non-cognitivism', which in turn is often treated as synonymous with 'anti-realism', particularly in ethics and theology. If we were to frame a question to capture this construal of the distinction, it would be along the following lines, where we ask about the function of a religious utterance (descriptive or expressive/prescriptive):

> COG
>
> Is the utterance *x* a statement that is capable of truth or falsity?

On this construal (COG), one is a realist if one answers that *x* is a statement that is capable of truth or falsity, and an anti-realist if one answers that it is not. This is useful enough, if we are only interested in the particular question of whether or not an utterance is a truth-apt statement. But this construal has real limitations when we join it up with a wider set of questions and an extensive literature. What we immediately notice is that on many plausible and live construals of the distinction (any of the further accounts given in this chapter, all of which have their exponents), although expressivism and prescriptivism are indeed incompatible with realism, one could nonetheless be an anti-realist without endorsing expressivism or prescriptivism. This is because on many construals of the distinction, an anti-realist is talking about the status of the *truth* of statements, where the anti-realist claims that the truth is dependent, for example, upon our minds, beliefs, or epistemic practices.

There can be a number of different motivations for a thinker embracing anti-realism on the COG construal of the realism/anti-realism distinction. A thinker could have embraced some of the other forms of anti-realism set out later in this chapter, and consider, for example, that the truth of a statement about God is dependent upon our beliefs, if the statement is construed (perhaps unhelpfully) as making descriptive truth claims. This might lead a thinker to consider that expressivism, or prescriptivism, provides the most perspicuous analysis of religious utterances, which on the surface appear initially, and misleadingly, to be descriptions. Alternatively, it might be that a thinker is a convinced atheist, but regards religious utterances as somehow valuable. Although these are possible motivations for embracing anti-realism (COG), it is also conceivable that our anti-realist (COG) will refuse to be drawn on these wider claims (about atheism, or mind/belief independence). Indeed, it is characteristic of Wittgensteinian commentators, such as D. Z. Phillips, to offer an expressivist or prescriptivist analysis of religious utterances, whilst fiercely resisting attempts to push them into a declaration of atheism, or of ontological anti-realism, where truth is construed as dependent somehow upon minds/beliefs/epistemic practices.

This can be frustrating for critics of Wittgensteinian approaches, who are convinced that anti-realism (COG) must be motivated by wider ontological (lack of) commitment. There is an argument to be had as to whether the Wittgensteinian is implicitly more (or less) committed than he or she wants to admit, but this is indeed an argument to be had, and not something that should be built into the construal of the realism/anti-realism distinction from the start. That said, one could be a realist on the COG construal, but an anti-realist on other construals, if one considered that the statement 'God exists' is indeed descriptive in some sense, but that the truth of this statement depends, for example, upon our beliefs or epistemic practices. It is advisable, therefore, to distinguish COG construals of the distinction from other construals: COG anti-realism might be motivated by other forms of anti-realism, but it might not be, or not uncontroversially. A COG realist might endorse realism on other construals, or she might not.

## Ontological Construals

Most people, unless they have read too much (and perhaps not enough) philosophy, can appreciate the force of a central issue that one version of the realism/anti-realism distinction attempts to track. This is the question of mind-independence or -dependence.

Although this will need considerable refining, the intuitively plausible starting question is as follows:

> ONT 1
>
> Is the truth or falsity of the statement that *x* exists independent of mind?

One is a realist about *x* if one responds that *x* exists (or does not) independently of mind; and an anti-realist about *x* if one denies that *x* exists (or does not) independently of mind. This construal of the distinction has the quality at least of lineage. It has an ancestor in medieval debates about whether universals ('beauty', 'goodness', 'human being') only exist (or fail to) if they have a reality independent of individuals and of our conceptual categories, or whether universals are merely features of the way in which we think about individuals, enjoying only a 'nominal' reality (hence the position is known as 'nominalism'). Moving into the modern period, the distinction maps onto debates about forms of idealism: whether features of the world have a reality that goes beyond their being ideas in the mind (Berkeley), or whether core features of the world are the product of how we receive the world, rather than being in the world itself (Kant).

Even before we have complicated this basic starting question, there is an issue that is immediately thrown up in relation to how we are employing the realism/anti-realism distinction: the implication that one can be a realist even if one does not think that *x* exists. Not all applications of the distinction, perhaps especially in theology and ethics, are compatible with this assumption. Something needs to be said about construals of the distinction that deny this assumption. True to my opening claim, I concede immediately that these are perfectly legitimate, apt-for-purpose formulations of the distinction, but also that they are not the only way of conceiving the distinction, and not always the most useful.

Some commentators prefer to employ the term 'realism', where what is envisaged is someone who is committed both to the mind-independent status of *x* (if *x* were to exist, it would have to be mind-independent), and also to the existence of *x*. 'Realism about God', implies theism as opposed to atheism, as well as the claim that the God believed in is independent of mind. Realism involves 'commitment' to ontological realities. Our framing question in this case would need to become:

> ONT $1^{\text{COMM}}$
>
> Is the truth or falsity of the statement that *x* exists independent of mind, and does *x* exist?

This is useful enough for some purposes where the atheism/theism dispute is our main target. Frequently, though, we are interested in thinkers who want to sustain some sort of commitment to religious statements, but on an alternative footing. We want to be able to distinguish atheists from 'alternative-theists'. To raise interesting questions in this context, we will need to frame the distinction in such a way that to be a realist about *x* is not necessarily to believe in the existence of *x*, but to consider that what makes a statement about *x* true *or false* is (or would be) a mind-independent reality. So a classical atheist can agree with the classical theologian that religious statements are to be construed as 'realist', where the atheist thinks that what makes religious statements false is that (independently of our minds) there is no God.

Whilst conceding that, in some intellectual contexts, it might be appropriate to do otherwise, and with the caveat that any realist religious believer will believe in religion as well as realism (and the two are not the same), in what follows, the assumption will be that the various realism/anti-realism distinctions set out are neutral about whether or not statements about *x* are true or false: the issue is what it is for a statement to be true or false. Although I might talk about 'truth' being independent in various ways, this should be understood to mean 'truth (or falsity)'.

Nothing about the distinction itself, when construed ontologically, should be taken as implying or entailing anything at all about how much access we might or might not have to the truth about *x*, or about how (if at all) we access this truth (whether through correspondence, coherence, verification procedures, or lucky guesses), or about what sort of thing *x* might fundamentally be (a substance/accident/a bundle of properties/a self-subsisting simple being). A typical strategy in realist/anti-realist dust-ups is for one side to attempt to strap onto the other side unpalatable further commitments; the job of defence is then to show that these unpalatable commitments have nothing to do with realism/anti-realism in this area, and might even be a problem for the other side, if they are a problem at all. This is a legitimate, or at least unavoidable, part of the process of philosophical dialectic, but if our purpose is to get more light than heat, arguments that one's opponent is committed to absurdities should be just that: substantive arguments subsequent to the initial distinction drawn, rather than contestable absurdities build into the distinction itself.

The first level of complexity with the ontological construal of realism/anti-realism (ONT 1) arises when we ask what sort of 'reality' might be substituted for *x* in 'does *x* exist independently of mind?' Are we talking about 'entities', which is to say singular terms with (or without) referents ('unicorns', 'ghosts', 'trees'), or about 'facts', where by 'facts' we mean dimensions and aspects of the world that are represented by whole sentences in a language that form statements ('it is wrong to murder; for a clear statement of this distinction and its importance, see Brock and Mares 2007: 2–3)?' If one thinks that the language of 'facts' is too infected by association with the category of entities, another term can be used. The important thing is that by this term, '*x*' (where we use 'facts'), we just mean 'dimensions and aspects of the world that are represented by whole sentences in a language that form statements'.

Moral realists do not have to believe in 'queer' entities in order to have a realist construal of moral facts. This applies also in other areas: for example, realism about the laws of nature, about modal categories such as necessity and contingency, and realism about mathematics. Understanding that there is a difference between the realist's commitment to the objectivity of a statement, and the reality of objects, helps to deflate one source of theological anxiety about realism.

Some philosophers of religion and theologians have grave misgivings talking about God as an object or an entity. There will be misgivings, where it is thought that the intrinsic grammar that surrounds the concept of an object, or entity, is constantly corrosive of our thinking about God, by pulling us towards the paradigm of discrete, contingent, (spatially and temporally) extended, created things. Other philosophers of religion defend the propriety of talking about God as an object, pointing out that this is meant only in the abstract sense of being the 'object' of our thought or enquiry. Not all 'objects' are medium-sized dry physical objects: there are also mathematical objects, for example, which nobody argues are extended in space and time. Such philosophers can point to the way in which Aquinas is prepared to use the language of 'oneness', or 'substance' (albeit a unique type of self-subsisting substance), to talk about God, and suggest that we can properly explain, and frame, our talk of God as a divine object and entity. Such philosophers will not require or seek alternative formulations of the realism/anti-realism distinction.

In setting out different construals of the realism/anti-realism distinction, it is not appropriate to take a stand on the nature of the being of God. What can be said, though, is that many theologians *do* have profound difficulties with talking about God as an object or entity. The problem with always and only construing the realism/anti-realism distinction in terms of the existence of objects, with one particular (albeit unique) object ('God') in view, is that the theologian who is allergic to object language will always have to dismiss either realism or the value of the realism/anti-realism distinction as such.

This can lead to further misunderstanding, and to more heat than light. The object-happy philosopher of religion becomes convinced that the theologian has reneged on ontological commitments that she ought to have, suspecting the theologian of 'postmodernism' and 'relativism'. The theologian will deny that believing in a divine object was ever part of the orthodox premodern tradition, even if it 'regrettably' entered modernity. The theologian might be 'postmodern', but only in a limited sense of objecting to some innovative and erroneous patterns of thinking in 'modernity'. In return, the theologian is convinced that the philosopher of religion is a reductionist about God, conceiving of God on a par with other extended and contingent objects. Neither the object-happy philosopher of religion nor the object-averse theologian have understood each other's aspirations, and both trigger fears in each other that need not arise. It seems better to allow some flexibility in our discourse when framing the realism/anti-realism distinction and to allow the argument to find its proper level, which is around the question of how to talk about the being of God.

Some theologians will have further worries as to whether it is sufficient to stipulate that the 'factual' need not be restricted to objects/entities, in order to avoid any reductionism in realist construals of theological statements about God. Certain theological statements could indeed still be made and construed in a realist and factual sense, because they are not about God directly, but about the world inasmuch as the world depends upon God, and God acts in the world: 'the world is created by God' is a statement that (on a realist construal) picks out a dimension of the world—indeed, for theologians, the central dimension. Nonetheless, many theologians would consider there to be a danger in pushing doctrines concerning God ('God is simple/the creator *ex nihilo*/perfectly good/triune/incarnate in Jesus Christ') through the mesh of the realism/anti-realism debate, certainly where this distinction is construed in terms of entities, but even where we invoke the notion of the 'factual', where 'factual' means 'dimensions and aspects *of the world* picked out by statements'.

These same theologians would find it difficult, and grammatically artificial, to disentangle the language of 'factuality' from talk about the (created) world. Even the etymology is against us, with *factum* denoting a deed, something done, and *facere* the action of creating, causing, or making. Just as the notion of factuality might need to be introduced (to supplement the category of an 'entity') to capture what the realist about ethics or laws of nature is committed to, it would be appropriate for theology to insist upon a further addition to the conceptual repertoire, in order to capture to what a distinctively theological realist is committed.

As with the debate around the concept of a divine 'object', it is not appropriate to take a stand on the question of the appropriateness of 'factuality' language in relation to God. However, it is appropriate to ask for flexibility when framing the realist/anti-realism distinction, so that we can correctly locate where the dispute really is. The theologian who denies that statements about God are factual need not be reneging on the ontological commitment that is associated with realism; she could be objecting to a particular conception of the being of God. It is better to have a construal of the realism/anti-realism distinction that can track this, rather than a construal that forces such a theologian either to identify as an anti-realist, or to deny the value of the distinction altogether.

Almost any term might be suspect, at least to some theologians, but perhaps the least offensive, and a term with the backing of some of the tradition, would be 'being', where we ask whether 'dimensions and aspects of *being* picked out by statements' are true or false independently of mind. Theologians who have brushed against Neoplatonism through Heidegger would want to talk about God being 'beyond being', where 'being' also carries a depth grammar of createdness and contingency. What the 'beyond being' theologian is trying to protect can be dealt with through the category of analogy, where realism is compatible with a strong sense of the analogical nature of language used of God. Perfection terms such as 'being', 'goodness', and 'knowledge' for a Thomist are exemplified plenitudinously and paradigmatically in God (St Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I q.13 a.2): indeed, God is not only 'good', partaking of an independent property, but God is also 'goodness' itself; God does not simply 'exist', partaking in existence, but God is existence itself (hence the 'beyond being' moment; *ST*, I q.3 a.4). The meaning of the concepts 'goodness' and 'being' derive, for us, from our experience of the created world, where we encounter fragmented and partial participations in the paradigm of divine goodness and being (*ST*, I q.13 a.3). When we talk about 'goodness' and 'being', we only have an analogical grasp of the perfect paradigm of the goodness and being that is God.

This is sometimes explained in a misleading way: that when we say 'God is good', we only have an analogical sense of what goodness means *when ascribed to God*, as if our ordinary uses of the concept of 'goodness' were in perfect order. This is not quite what Aquinas says: it is rather that we *never* really and completely know what certain perfection terms mean (including 'being' itself), because they apply paradigmatically to God (*ST*, I q.13 a.5). We only have an analogical grasp (a genuine but partial participation) of the meaning of 'God is good' because we do not (yet) see the divine nature in the beatific vision (*ST*, I q.13 and I–II q.1–5). In terms of the realist question ('is the truth of the statement that *God is good* independent of minds?'), the answer is that it emphatically is, if we are talking about created minds (about which, more below); it is because of this independence that we know that we only have an analogical grasp of the concept of divine goodness (and so of goodness as such). To believe that something is true about *x* is not the same as saying that everything that is true about *x* (even in the narrow context of the terms involved in the belief itself) is or could be grasped and believed. An understanding of the analogical nature of our talk about God in fact recommends a realist construal, if realism is suitably expressed to encompass more than entities, or even 'facts', where the category of 'being' has been suggested as the means to achieve this expansion.

Returning to the formulation ONT 1, we move to the last part of the question: 'independent of mind'. The question of what sort of 'thing/fact/dimension of being' *x* might be generates distinctively theological concerns. Similarly, moving to the last part of ONT 1, 'independent of mind' generates distinctive theological complexity. The philosophical theologian will immediately need to disambiguate between 'being independent of *human* minds' and 'being independent of mind as such (which includes the divine mind)'. According to classical theology, truth (or falsity) is not independent of mind, but dependent upon—created and conserved by—the divine mind; where some truths that are dependent upon the divine mind are independent of created human minds. A certain sort of ontological anti-realism works across the board, therefore, when framing statements about the relationship between the divine mind and created reality:

> ONT $1^{DM}$
>
> Is the truth or falsity of the statement that *x* exists independent of the divine mind?

We can call this position 'classical divine-mind anti-realism'. Theologians who accept divine simplicity—whereby God's nature is identical with God's essence, existence, and actions—will even be able to say that the truth of all statements, even statements about God, depends upon the divine mind; although, if we embrace divine simplicity, we can also say that all truths about God depend upon the divine will, divine existence, divine action, or any aspect of the divine being.

Classical divine-mind anti-realism, construed in ontological terms, is apt for purpose when we want to uncover a relatively neglected texture in the history of ideas. Usually when the distinction is discussed, though, the focus has been on whether there are entities or facts (and we add 'dimensions of being') that are independent of human minds. At this point, we hit some knottier complexities.

Drawing the distinction in terms of whether something is independent of (or dependent on) mind is apt enough for purpose if we are sorting through a class of entities (or putative entities) such as trees, planets, ghosts, or unicorns, where there are no human artefacts, and no reference to human minds themselves. Where artefacts and minds are concerned, the distinction will need reframing. Coins, chairs, and computers would not exist were it not for the fact that minds conceived, designed, and crafted them. But it is unlikely to be useful to consider these human-made entities as 'mind-dependent' in the same way that unicorns are; or, at least, we will want to distinguish the complex and considerable mind-dependence that a working currency has from the sort of mind-dependence that coins have. Where we have artefacts in our picture, it might be sufficient to nuance the question at the heart of the (ontologically conceived) distinction to read as follows:

> ONT 2
>
> Are statements about *x* true or false independently of minds constantly thinking about *x*?

The 'thinking about *x*' here, unless the distinction is to have a fairly limited application, will usually be construed as not restrictive to explicitly framed and assented-to statements, but rather the whole cognitive activity of minds. This formulation allows that the chair would not exist had it not been for minds, but that the chair does not continue to depend for its existence on being thought about by minds. Again, there are some suggestive theological parallels: classical divine-mind anti-realism would still apply across the created realm, as everything created does indeed constantly depend upon the divine mind thinking about it, because everything is made by God. Human-mind anti-realism is more limited, and does not include the realm of artefacts, which 'depend' upon human minds only as a created universe would 'depend' upon a deistic demiurge that shapes matter into an order that then exists independently of the demiurge.

The entities or facts that we might be considering could also include minds, intentions, desires, and beliefs. Minds depend trivially upon the existence of minds, but minds do not create, project, or invent minds, which is typically the sort of ontological texture that the philosopher employing the realist/anti-realist distinction is tracking. Intentions, desires, and beliefs depend upon the existence of minds, but plausibly not always upon the thoughts we have about intentions, desires, and beliefs. If we want the (ontologically conceived) distinction to do useful work for us at this point, we will need to reform our question along the following lines (with a number of variants):

> ONT 3
>
> Are statements about *x* true or false independently of:
>
> (a) our beliefs about *x*?
>
> (b) our evidence for *x*?
>
> (c) our epistemic practices for discerning the truth or falsity of *x*?

Each of these subclauses has a slightly different purchase that will impact on how the question is answered in different cases: ONT 3a (our 'beliefs about *x*') asks whether the truth or falsity of the statement is independent of our explicitly framed and held commitments; ONT 3b ('evidence for *x*') allows that someone might not be able to evaluate and explicitly articulate the evidence, but asks whether, nonetheless, the truth or falsity of the statement about *x* is (or is not) dependent upon this evidence; ONT 3c ('epistemic practices') has a similarly normative quality (what the competent reasoner ought to have access to), but evokes a wider range of ways of forming beliefs than the evaluation of evidence.

Whether a mind exists or not is independent of our belief about this; even if, in our case, we have privileged access to the fact that it exists (and surely we do, albeit in a low-ramification sense of 'mind'). Whether intentions, desires, and beliefs depend entirely upon our beliefs about them is a more complex question, and takes us into hermeneutical depths. One is likely to gravitate towards a 'realist' account, if one agrees that we can have an intention, desire, or belief without being able accurately to articulate it, where intentions, beliefs, and desires are manifested in part by the whole trajectory of one's behaviour, which includes but is not exhausted by self-reflexive utterances.

That a way of carving out a distinction generates complex results, with some facts and entities straddling the distinction, need not itself tell against the distinction. Where reality is blurred, a sharp and precise picture is a distortion rather than an improvement. Recent interest in 'response dependence' attempts to track features of our experience that are irreducibly and inseparably co-constituted by that which is given, and the means by which we make that which is given intelligible. It seems unhelpful to fret over whether 'response-dependent' positions are fundamentally 'realist' or 'anti-realist'; rather they employ the realist/anti-realist distinction, but with an interest in a domain of facts and entities where different aspects can be captured by statements that incorporate both realist and anti-realist moments. Some facts are intrinsically facts about our response to the world, which are in part constituted by how we understand these facts.

## Epistemological Construals

All of the formulations in the previous section have centred around the concept of 'independence': the truth (or falsity) of statements about *x* is independent of mind, or of mind's thinking about *x*, or of our beliefs about *x*. In itself, though, this independence clause is neutral between epistemological scepticism and confidence. It might in fact be that the truth about *x* is independent of mind, but that we have access to all the truths about *x,* or none, or only some. Independence does not mean unknowability: it just means that what is known or unknown (which might be all, some, or none of the truth) is true or false independently of mind.

Some philosophers and theologians have found that a distinction that says nothing about the sort of access we have to the truth is insufficient to do effective work in philosophical theology. The worry is this: the claim that 'in principle' there are truths about God that could be construed realistically, but that we have no (or very limited) access to these truths, renders these truths of no importance in our religious and ethical construal of the world. This position, usually described as 'Kantian' (with its unknowable realm of the 'thing-in-itself'), has been accused by one thinker of presupposing an 'extreme doctrine of transcendence' (See Alston 1995: 50)—the (mistaken) view that God is not only ontologically transcendent, but conceptually so, such that we can have no true beliefs about God. Where this is a concern, the realist/anti-realist distinction will be augmented to incorporate an epistemological clause, along the following lines:

> EPIST
> (i) Are statements about *x* true or false independently of our minds/our minds thinking about *x*/our beliefs about *x*/our evidence for *x*/our epistemic practices for discerning the truth or falsity about *x*?
> (ii) Can we in principle have access to some of these truths about *x*?

On this construal, someone is only a realist if she can answer 'yes' to both (i) and (ii). In this case, (i) is framed to be neutral between different types of ontological realism/anti-realism, as our focus is on the epistemological component. A level of epistemological confidence is made criterial for realism. A concern with the independence of the truth about *x* and our beliefs can also lead theologians and philosophers of religion with realist instincts in another direction: a determination that truths about God should not be reduced to the epistemic practices of an individual, group, or tradition. If extreme conceptual 'transcendence' is associated with Kantianism, this sort of reduction of truth to practices is more commonly diagnosed as Wittgensteinian (See Insole 2007: 364–82). In this case, the further epistemological condition will go along the following lines:

(iii) Is it possible that our epistemically best beliefs about *x* could still be wrong?

In (ii) epistemological confidence is built into the distinction, and in (iii) a sense of epistemic insecurity is stipulated. Thinkers are likely to gravitate towards one more than the other, depending on who or what they are reacting to, but there is no reason why both clauses could not be added to the core distinction: we can believe that we have access to some truths about *x*, but also that our epistemically best beliefs about *x* could still be wrong. This is especially the case if we construe having 'access to some of these truths about *x*' in (ii) as not requiring 'knowledge' (which usually involves true beliefs with a high degree of warrant), but simply 'true beliefs' (which might require some degree or type of warrant, but not to the same extent as knowledge).

There have been criticisms of epistemological additions to the realist/anti-realist distinction (see Brock and Mares 2007: 6–7). The epistemic confidence condition (ii) is found to be implausible as a criterion for realism across the board: we can think of cases where there would in principle be unknowable objects/facts, but where we would not want this to undermine the possibility of their reality (facts about the past, facts about other universes, facts about objects outside the light cone). The epistemic insecurity condition (iii) has also been found wanting. It slips up when it comes to situations where we might be thought to have incorrigible and infallible knowledge. If one thought that we had such knowledge of our own existence (without some of the Cartesian accretions), it would seem peculiar to deny realism about our own existence upon this basis.

These criticisms are well made if what we are searching for is a global criterion for realism and anti-realism across the board. But if, less ambitiously, we are looking for a working *theological* distinction, philosophers of religion and theologians have distinctive and appropriate reasons for building in these epistemological considerations. In both cases, the desire to add the epistemological clauses is as much motivated by theological considerations as general epistemology. They both arise from aspects of the doctrine of God: the epistemic confidence clause is inspired by the classical Christian belief that God is a God who acts and reveals Godself to creatures. This relates to a further irreducibly theological reason for endorsing something like (ii): faith. Faith is something of a *sui generis* epistemic category, distinctive to theology. On at least one mainstream understanding of faith, originating with Hugh of St Victor, coming through Aquinas, and still live in Kant's first *Critique*, our assent to statements that can only be known through divine revelation (scripture, and other divine action, as mediated through the tradition) has the following features: we have evidence that is akin to the warrant we might have for a probable opinion (and not more than this), but, through a movement of the will, we hold to the beliefs with the certainty that we attach to knowledge, because of the importance of what is believed in, and because this movement of the will is caused by divine action (see Insole 2013: Ch. 7). At the same time, the God who is revealed is a God who is beyond our categories of conceptualization, free to be God beyond our grasp of God. The epistemic insecurity clause (iii) is theologically grounded in a meditation upon God's transcendence and aseity, and the absolute independence of the creator *ex nihilo* from the creation (see Webster 2007: 147–62).

## SEMANTIC CONSTRUALS

Emerging from twentieth-century analytical philosophy, there is a fourth way of characterizing the realist/anti-realist distinction, not in terms of cognitivism, ontological independence, or epistemic confidence/insecurity, but in terms of how concepts and statements get their meaning. The 'anti-realist' on this construal of the distinction maintains that our understanding of the meaning of the statement is given entirely by the conditions under which we are justified in asserting the statement. The 'realist' denies this, and maintains that (part of) the meaning of a statement is given by what would make it true, independently of the conditions under which we are justified in asserting the statement. There are cases where such a distinction seems quite apt: the meaning of the claim 'Tony Hancock was very amusing' would seem to be given by our grasp of the conditions under which we are justified in asserting the statement (people laughing). It would seem peculiar and heroic to insist on some further transcendent basis for this statement, beyond the assertability conditions. Other statements more intuitively seem to call for a realist analysis: 'Saturn has two moons', for example. Using our question format, the semantic realist/anti-realist distinction could be captured in the following terms:

> SEM
>
> Is the meaning of the statement *x* exhausted by the conditions under which we are justified in asserting *x*?

On this construal, one is an anti-realist if one answers that the meaning of the statement *x* is exhausted by the conditions under which we are justified in asserting *x*, and one is a realist if one denies this. Typically, those who recommend the semantic characterization of the realism/anti-realism distinction are not content to let it be one apt-for-purpose distinction, which categorizes some statements as realist and others as anti-realist. The tendency is rather to insist that, contrary to pre-philosophical expectations, the meaning of all our statements is given entirely by the conditions under which we are justified in asserting them. Realism is construed—defined, even—as denying that the meaning of our statements is given by the conditions in which we are justified in asserting these statements. There is then a tendency amongst semantic anti-realists to insist that the realist denial—that the meaning of statements is exhausted by their assertability conditions—commits the realist (even if he or she does not realize it) to more or less impossible correspondence theories of truth, where somehow our belief-shaped judgements hook up onto an experience, which must be both experiential (to be part of the world) and non-experiential (to be part of our belief structure).

Semantic anti-realism does not directly say anything about ontology, and is concerned not so much with what sort of things are true, as with the truth about truth. We can envisage someone who is a global semantic anti-realist and therefore a semantic anti-realist about the statement 'there is a God'. Even the most committed realist would have to concede that the semantic anti-realist, by her own lights, believes in the truth of the statement that 'there is a God', inasmuch as she can believe that anything at all is true. It could be objected that the global semantic anti-realist is committed to at least a meta-level thesis that ontology has very little to do with the meaning (and so truth conditions) of our statements, and so does not *really* believe that 'there is a God'. In debates where semantic anti-realism is at work, the italics often come out. But, at least if we do not want to say that semantic anti-realists *really* believe, we need a way to distinguish a person with this sort of general non-adherence to a particular conception of truth from someone who holds a realist conception of truth but does not *really* believe in the truth of the Christian faith. Once the difference between the semantic realist and anti-realist is put in terms of which conception of truth one holds, the debate becomes both fundamental, but also perhaps less serious. That is to say, we are not dealing with a confessional or doctrinal difference, nor with a disagreement between theist and atheist. Rather, we are dealing with a debate between two thinkers who confess belief in God, but who disagree about what a belief is. Both thinkers hold that it is true that there is a God, but they disagree philosophically about what constitutes such truth because they disagree about what constitutes truth as such.

The debate between the semantic realist and anti-realist is one of the most nuanced and intricate in the literature, with clear distinctions and substantive commitments emerging briefly, only to vanish in the conceptual quicksand. Certain characteristic patterns and moves can be identified. The semantic anti-realist typically attempts to saddle the realist with implausible correspondence theories, whilst the realist tries to show that the anti-realist requires a notion of the 'epistemically ideal', which ends up functioning as a synonym for (realist) truth, if anti-realism is to remain plausible. In what follows, a more 'realist' perspective on the debate is given first. The same issue is then construed through the eyes of a subtle and mercurial semantic anti-realist.

At this point, it becomes unclear what precisely is at stake in the debate. First of all, I set out the more 'realist' perspective. If the meaning and truth conditions of a statement are exhausted by the conditions under which we are justified in asserting it, this cannot mean 'any old conditions' under which someone is justified in asserting the statement. Such conditions would be too diverse and inadequate to constitute the meaning of a statement. The meaning of the statement must be given by 'ideally justified' assertability conditions, or conditions that are 'superassertible'. That is to say, they are the conditions under which an epistemically ideal subject would be justified in asserting $x$. Different semantic anti-realists take different approaches to this issue. Michael Dummett focuses on the way in which competent speakers acquire and manifest their understanding of the conditions under which a statement is verified. Hilary Putnam looks to an idealization of rational acceptability, and Crispin Wright to a similar conception of 'superassertability'. In any case, however it is put, the realist worries that it can be hard to unpack the meaning of 'competence', or 'ideal', or 'super' in these formulations without drawing upon something that looks like 'truth' independent of our (contingent and inadequate) grasp of the conditions under which the statement is justified.

Those suspicious of semantic anti-realism discern a slide towards an ideal epistemic agent that finds its resting place in God, returning by a circuitous route to divine-mind anti-realism. So a philosophical theologian who is otherwise a realist, might be led to reflect that there is a genuine debate as to whether semantic anti-realism applies to God's grasp of statements: it looks quite plausible to suggest that God's grasp of the meaning of a statement is co-extensive, or identical with, the conditions under which God is justified in assenting to the statement. God is always ideally justified, in such a way that there is no gap between truth and ideal justification.

Related to this is the realist's sense that the semantic anti-realist has failed to provide an account of the different assertability conditions of 'true' and 'ideally justified': we are able to understand statements such as 'my belief is ideally justified according to all available standards, but it might not be true', and for some religious believers the possibility of making such statements is rather important for their spiritual and epistemic humility. The inability to make such statements leads back to theological anxieties that surround the issue of epistemic insecurity, whereby God becomes reduced to a set of practices. The 'Yale school' of 'post-liberal' philosophical theology arguably has some affinities with semantic anti-realism, at least when it *exclusively* focuses on the grammatical assertability conditions of key doctrines, alongside a sense that sceptical anxieties about their 'truth' are fundamentally inappropriate. Typically, the implication is that such anxieties show a lack of proper doctrinal formation and theological commitment; it might be more charitable (and accurate) to acknowledge that the holding open of such realist/sceptical possibilities arises from a disagreement about the correct philosophical account of meaning, which in itself is a 'secular' philosophical dispute about which there is much to be said on both sides. There is nothing in the scriptures or tradition that commands us to have a globally semantic anti-realist theory of meaning.

These critiques have arisen from a realist's sense of what the semantic anti-realist is unable to account for. But a subtle semantic anti-realist would think that, inasmuch as the concept of 'truth beyond ideal justification' can be meaningful at all, semantic anti-realism is perfectly well equipped to understand it. Such a concept of truth points, from within our immanent practices, to the shifting ideal limit of the epistemic virtues exemplified within our belief systems. A mercurial semantic anti-realist can indeed say that 'my belief is ideally justified according to all available standards, but it might not be true': the point is that such a claim gets its meaning not by being hitched onto an inaccessible ontological reality (what would that be, and how would it work?) but by marking up as transitional, from within practices of applying our epistemic virtues, whatever values of simplicity, explanatory power, and coherence are currently operating. The semantic anti-realist can say that it is not *these* virtues that exhaust the meaning of a concept such as truth, but that the work done by 'truth' is constantly stretching, reapplying, and transforming these same virtues. In the light of what will this stretching, reapplying, and transforming be untertaken? It would have to be in the light of other epistemic virtues, variously deployed and understood, against a further disappearing horizon of ideal justification, where the 'ideality' is never reduced to a particular set of practices.

When the realist replies that this notion of an ideal limit does all the work done by a more traditional realist conception of truth, the semantic anti-realist can respond, 'well exactly, but what is interesting here is not that the traditional concept of truth is back (which perhaps it is), but that the semantically anti-realist construal of truth has managed to swallow up the work done by the traditional conception'. The identity, for all practical purposes, of the semantic anti-realist's ideal justification (where ideality is a disappearing limit) and the realist's concept of truth (where we do not claim to know the whole truth) cuts both ways, and both sides can claim to have swallowed up the other. Once we have got to this point, it is unclear what, if anything, is at stake between the subtle realist (who does not claim to know the whole truth, or to be able to latch statements onto a corresponding reality) and the mercurial anti-realist (who does not claim the truth to be relative to any particular community of practice).

Although the subtle (theological) realist and the mercurial (theological) anti-realist might converge, we could expect some more substantive disagreement between mercurial (secular) anti-realists and mercurial (theological) anti-realists, relating to the sort of 'epistemic virtues' to which each of these constituencies gravitate. We might expect the secular anti-realist to place a high value on elegant epistemic features such as simplicity, explanatory power, and coherence. At least some theologians (although not all) will have a different set of epistemic values, barely comprehensible to the secular anti-realist: for example, obedience, prayerfulness, discipleship, and faithfulness. As we have found before, we should be content when a disagreement finds its proper level. Here the disagreement is properly located around the question of what constitutes epistemic virtue, even where it is agreed that truth is immanent somehow to our epistemic virtues. As we have repeatedly found, a nuanced understanding of different ways of construing the realism/anti-realism distinction helps us to ask the right questions, rather than giving us a set of answers across the board.

## Concluding Reflections

The legitimate diversity of ways of construing the distinction places limitations on its power and significance as a global categorization of a deep philosophical instinct or commitment. The distinction is a more-or-less appropriate tool, which can be used skilfully or ineptly, when trying to interpret the status of a particular set of statements. In this way, the distinction can be seen to have less in common with categorizations such as 'religious/secular', 'theist/atheist', and 'empiricist/rationalist', and more in common with (contestable, but still useful for many) terms of art such as 'a priori/a posteriori', 'analytic/synthetic', and 'contingent/necessary'.

That the distinction is not a natural kind also cuts the other way, and limits the scope for dismissing or 'going beyond' the distinction. The distinction is a term of art. One can object to the particular way it is framed in a particular situation, but to be 'against' the distinction altogether, in all circumstances, is just to be against precision, nuance, subtlety, and rigour in thinking as such. Such an obfuscatory policy might itself be apt for some purposes, but these purposes will hardly be clarity of thought, or philosophical illumination. In the whole warp and weft of our creaturely lives, clarity of thought is not everything. The purposes to which the distinction, and refusals to engage with the distinction, can be turned include precision, clarity, negotiation, dialectic, apologetics, therapy (of the Wittgensteinian kind), polemic, conversion, and demolition. We had at least better get a grip on which purpose is being served by a particular construal or refusal we are being subjected to, or subjecting others to.

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# CHAPTER 18

# SCEPTICISM

BILLY DUNAWAY AND JOHN HAWTHORNE

## INTRODUCTION

To what extent are the answers to theological questions knowable? And if the relevant answers are knowable, which sorts of inquirers are in a position to know them? In this chapter we do not answer these questions directly but instead supply a range of tools that may help us make progress here. The tools consist of plausible structural constraints on knowledge. After articulating them, we shall go on to indicate some ways in which they interact with theological scepticism. In some cases the structural constraints bear directly on whether one can know answers to theological questions. But the structural considerations are related to theological scepticism in other interesting ways as well; for instance, we will also be using them to explore the significance of scepticism, by addressing questions such as 'To what extent does it matter whether or not we can *know* the answer to theological questions?'

In next section, we will outline a list of plausible structural features of knowledge. Then, beginning in the subsequent section, we discuss each in connection with some of the contemporary debates in theology. This is merely a preliminary sampling of the range of issues that might be fruitfully investigated in the framework we outline. While much more could be added beyond what we say here, we hope to show that careful thinking about knowledge is of interest to familiar epistemological debates in theology. Some of these results are friendly to a sceptical outlook, and others are not. The chapter's concluding section provides a brief overview of context-sensitivity and epistemic defeat, and sounds a more pessimistic note on the potential for these resources to contribute to the theological issues we address.

Our focus will be on sceptical concerns about knowledge, not about certainty or justification. Those who think that knowledge is to be illuminated via the concepts of certainty and/or justification might think that the most helpful way into scepticism is via one or both of those concepts. While we are not sympathetic to that outlook, we hope proponents of these alternative frameworks would nevertheless stand to benefit from our discussion, as many of the relevant structural issues will carry over.

## Structural Connections

We now present a range of foundational structural ideas about knowledge that we find somewhat plausible.

### No Error in Close Worlds

Some paradigmatic cases where subjects lack knowledge are cases where they could easily have had a false belief. For instance, subjects in typical Gettier cases have a (justified) true belief that is not knowledge owing to an accident of luck that renders the subjects' justified belief true. It is natural to say in these cases that things could easily have gone differently so as to result in a false belief in the subject, and that the subject in the actual world doesn't know for this reason (cf. Gettier 1963). The false belief in a nearby world does not have to be the *same* belief as in the actual world. If one forms mathematical beliefs about moderately large sums by random guessing, and one happens to guess the sum of 85 and 24 correctly, there is no way for the belief that 85 + 24 = 109 to be false in nearby worlds. But by virtue of arriving at one's beliefs in sums by mere guessing, one will form similar (though not strictly identical) false beliefs in nearby worlds. It is plausible that this kind of risk of error is incompatible with knowing the relevant sums. In what follows, we will call beliefs in actual or nearby counterfactual scenarios that are incompatible with a belief's being knowledge *bad companions* for that belief (thus, in our terminology, when in a nearby world one arrives at the false belief that 85 + 24 = 101 by guessing, that belief is a bad companion for one's actual true belief).

### Similarity of Belief-Forming Processes

Not just any nearby possibility of error is incompatible with knowledge. If a normally reliable informant told Betty that Jill is in Brazil, but Betty then happens to turn her head at the very moment Jill walks past a nearby window, Betty knows that Jill is not in Brazil. But there are nearby worlds where Betty fails to turn her head at that precise moment, and so continues to believe on the basis of testimony that Jill is in Brazil. One natural diagnosis of this case is that the belief-forming methods are too dissimilar—Betty's actual belief is formed on the basis of perception, while, in the nearby worlds where she holds a false belief, it is formed on the basis of testimony. Our preferred way of implementing this diagnosis avoids the need to fuss about individuation of methods, and so does not put too much weight on the fact that Betty's actual belief can be described as formed on the basis of 'perception', while her belief in a nearby world is formed on the basis of 'testimony'. Rather, what is important is that the fine-grained token causal processes leading up to Betty's beliefs are significantly dissimilar in the two cases (obviously this has something to do with the fact that one belief is formed on the basis of perception and the other on the basis of testimony, but ultimately the non-identity of the relevant coarse-grained methods is not what explains why Betty knows). Since the token causal processes leading up to the false beliefs in nearby worlds are sufficiently dissimilar, the nearby false belief is not a bad companion for Betty's actual belief that Jill is not in Brazil. In this view, two beliefs formed on the basis of broadly perceptual faculties might count as sufficiently dissimilar since the fine-grained causal processes leading up to the beliefs need not resemble each other to a high degree (see discussion of a similar principle in Williamson 2000).

## Closure and Counter-Closure

Deduction is a means to extending one's knowledge. This is encoded in a familiar 'closure'-style principle which in refined form is as follows:

> Closure: If one knows *p* and knows that *p* entails *q*, then if one deduces *q* on the basis of *p* while retaining knowledge throughout, then one knows *q*.
>
> (See Hawthorne 2004: 34)

As a companion to Closure we might naturally accept a 'counter-closure' principle which claims that deduction does not produce knowledge from unknown premises:

> Counter-closure: If one doesn't know *p* then if one deduces *q* on the basis of *p* while lacking knowledge of *p* throughout, then one doesn't know *q*.

## Knowledge-Entailing States

Timothy Williamson, Peter Unger, and others have pointed to a wide range of propositional attitudes whose presence seems to entail the presence of knowledge (see Williamson 2000, and Unger 1979). For example, one can see that there is a bird on the sill only if one knows that there is a bird on the sill. It is easy to see that true justified belief formed via vision is not enough—if one sees what is in fact a cleverly fashioned plastic bird on the sill, justifiably believes that there is a bird on the sill, but there is a bird elsewhere on the sill one does not notice, then one does not see that there is a bird on the sill. Plausible candidates for knowledge-entailing attitudes include not only seeing that *p*, but also remembering that *p*, regretting that *p* (though obviously not feeling regret at the thought that *p*), rejoicing that *p*, and many others.

The presence of a certain kind of reason action also seems to entail the presence of knowledge. Here we have in mind paradigmatic uses of the possessive reason construction to explain a person's actions. For example: Jim's reason for racing towards the sill was that there was a bird on the sill. In the plastic bird version of the case, this would be false even if the belief that there was a bird on the sill induced racing. As a number of authors have noticed, it seems that it takes knowledge to make a fact available as a 'personal'/'motivating' reason (see Hyman 1999, and Hawthorne and Magidor MS).

## Ignorance-Entailing States

The literature on knowledge also contains a large range of suggestions to the effect that certain states are incompatible with the presence of knowledge. We shall not pursue some of the more tendentious suggestions that have been made in this connection, which include 'uncertainty', 'opinion', and 'doubt'. In what follows we focus on a suggestion that is not merely plausible but which has particular interest in a theological setting. We have in mind the state of risking that *p* (typically expressed in English by constructions of the form 'In phi-ing, *x* risked that *x* would *F*'), as in: 'when breaking into the building, the burglar risked that he would be videotaped', or 'the investor risked that he would lose his life savings by investing in the stock market'. It seems clear that if the burglar knew that he would not be videotaped, he did not risk that he would and that if the investor knew that the stocks would go up, he did not risk that he would lose his life savings. Assuming this connection between risk and absence of knowledge, any state or activity that requires risk will in turn preclude knowledge.

## Normative Connections

We have gestured at entailment connections between knowledge and the presence and absence of other states. Arguably there are also interesting normative connections between knowledge and certain states such that even though there are no *entailment* connections, the presence or absence of knowledge instead has constitutive bearing on whether one *ought* to be in those states.

One plausible norm of this sort that has been much discussed in the literature connects knowledge and assertion: One ought to assert *p* only if one knows that *p*. (And insofar as we are attracted to this norm, we might also consider extending it to 'inner assertions', states of judging and/or believing.) But in what follows we shall be especially concerned with a few plausible norms connecting knowledge and action. Let us begin with a norm articulated by Saul Kripke in his 'Two Paradoxes of Knowledge' (Kripke 2011: 43):

> KRIPKE: If *A* knows that taking an action [i.e. any action] of type *T* leads to consequence *C*, and *A* wishes above all else to avoid *C* (i.e. this is the only relevant issue), then *A* should resolve now not to take any action of type *T*.

(Kripke acknowledges that it is difficult to state the norm in a fully rigorous way but nevertheless makes it clear that he finds something along these lines attractive.) The principle certainly does seem attractive. If a submarine commander knows that a certain military action will lead to nuclear war and wishes above all else to avoid nuclear war, then it certainly seems that the commander ought to resolve not to undertake that action. And insofar as one finds this principle compelling there is a companion principle that seems prima facie compelling as well:

> COMPANION KRIPKE: If *A* knows that taking any action of type *T* leads to consequence *C* and doesn't know of any action that is not of type *T* that it leads to consequence *C*, and *A* wishes above all else to secure *C*, then *A* should resolve to perform an action of type *T*.

If one wants to conquer the enemy above all else and there is only one action that one knows of to do it, then it seems one ought to do that. (Again, this is not fully satisfactory. For one thing, arguably both principles need some qualifications connected to what one is able to do. If one knows one can't but do any action of type *T*, then perhaps one should not resolve to avoid *T*-actions even if one knows that doing *T*-actions has bad consequences. And if one knows that actions of type *T* have great consequences but is unable to do any *T*-type actions then again perhaps one shouldn't resolve to perform any of them. And we shall later suggest other directions for refinement. We should also note in connection with these principles that they are only attractive when the 'ought' in play is a kind of subjective 'ought' since it turns on a subject's preferences and knowledge.)

With these structural features in hand, we can turn to a discussion of special issues that arise in the theological domain.

## CLOSE WORLDS: SENSITIVITY ARGUMENTS

One common argument against the possibility of knowledge begins from the observation that many people arrive at their theological beliefs via a causal process that is *insensitive* to the truth of these beliefs. The origins of many theological beliefs can be traced to environmental and cultural factors—in a simple case, it might be that the beliefs of one's parents and immediate community, plus a disposition to believe what one is taught, are sufficient to cause belief in a certain set of theological propositions. Assuming someone's theological beliefs were so caused, would it follow that the beliefs were not knowledge? One way of completing the argument for this conclusion is by pointing out that people who arrive at their beliefs in this way would have those beliefs *even if* they were false. The belief-formation process is, in other words, insensitive to the truth of these beliefs (see Nozick 1981). Here is the argument form:

> *From Insensitivity to Scepticism*
>
> 1. *X* believes *p*.
> 2. *X* would believe *p* even if *p* were false.
>
> Therefore *X* does not know *p*.

We should note in passing that arguments of this sort are particularly problematic for necessary truths, especially in the view that counterfactuals with necessarily false antecedents are vacuously true. Still, there are many theological propositions that are continent by pretty much anyone's lights. It would be a significant sceptical result if many of those could be shown to be unknown by something like the insensitivity argument. Moreover, proponents of arguments like this tend to refine them a little to take account of the structural observations of SIMILARITY. Perhaps premise 2 should read: *X* would believe *p using a relevantly similar method* even if *p* were false. What we say in what follows can be adapted to these refinements.

It is widely acknowledged that arguments of the form of *From Insensitivity to Scepticism* are pretty shaky. Many beliefs about the nature of our perceptual experience—for instance, that it is the product of an external world rather than hallucination—similarly fail to be sensitive. After all, were our perceptual experience the product of hallucination, we would still believe that it was not. But unless we wish to go in for quite a far-reaching scepticism, we should not take this insensitivity to indicate a failure to know that our experience is the product of external objects—the false beliefs about our experience in hallucination worlds are not, in our phraseology, bad companions for our actual beliefs about the external world. In sum, the claim that theological claims cannot be known because they are insensitive carries consequences that those of us inclined to reject scepticism in other domains will reject (see for example Sosa 1999 for more discussion of sensitivity principles).

Plausibly, the reason why the possibility where one falsely believes that one's perceptual experience is the product of an external world rather than hallucination does not supply a bad companion is that such a possibility is quite distant—there is no risk in one's actual circumstance that one's perceptual experiences are the products of hallucination. (Note that it is not incumbent on the external world believer to show that such possibilities are distant. The standard insensitivity argument proceeds by trying to show that even if external world beliefs are true, they fail to be knowledge for reasons of insensitivity. But if insensitivity considerations have little bite when the possibilities of error are distant, then insensitivity alone is not a decisive indicator that knowledge is absent.) The deficiencies of insensitivity arguments could just as well have been illustrated using theological examples.

Insensitivity arguments will, for the reasons given, be an unreliable tool for securing sceptical conclusions against both the atheist and the theist. Suppose an atheist believes that there is no God on the grounds that, were there an all-knowing, omnibenevolent, all-powerful being, certain evils would not have occurred. It will not do to argue that were this counterfactual false the atheist would still believe it true. If the worlds where the counterfactual is false are remote possibilities, they will not supply bad companions, and insensitivity may be neither here nor there (for further discussion of similar arguments see White 2010).

## Close Worlds: Private Interpretation

In the previous section we indicated, as a rough-and-ready heuristic, that errors at distant possibilities are irrelevant to the question of whether one actually knows. Assuming this heuristic, many appeals to possibilities of error will be dialectically ineffective, since the believer will reckon the possibilities too distant to matter. (And even if we were merely trying to satisfy ourselves on the question of whether the believer knows, we could only settle on the import of the possibility of error once we have settled whether it is a distant possibility or a close one.) But restricting the errors that constitute bad companions to those that occur in nearby worlds does not render all theological belief immune to compelling sceptical challenges. As an illustration, consider one who arrives at one's theological beliefs by reading a sacred text and forming beliefs on this basis. Here there is plenty of room for arguing that there is a significant risk of error, and hence no knowledge.

One way of fleshing out this argument relies on an important difference between interpretation of sacred texts and ordinary cases of knowledge by testimony. One can typically come to know by trusting an informant who knows. But many instances of interpretation of sacred texts will not fit this simple model, since the route from trusting the text to belief is more complicated. Suppose a text contains two kinds of sentence: those that make 'literal' assertions, which assert what is conventionally meant by the sentence, and those that make 'metaphorical' assertions, which do not assert the conventional meaning of the sentence, but rather some other claims that can be derived from the text as a whole plus facts about the context and intentions of the original author. (Thus the literal sentences are like a testifier who asserts 'there is a dog outside' to communicate that there is a dog outside, while the metaphorical sentences are like a testifier who says 'she is the cream in my coffee' to communicate that they have found a soulmate.) What should one believe if one trusts the text? Even granting that some interpreters do succeed in believing the literal content of the literal assertions and the metaphorical content of the metaphorical assertions, it is not implausible that they could easily have taken a metaphorical sentence as literal. If these mistakes result in beliefs in falsehoods, then even the true beliefs arrived at by textual interpretation will have bad companions and will not be knowledge. (The situation will be especially bleak for someone who is robustly disposed to take everything as literal in a completely flatfooted way. If there is in fact a mix of the literal and the metaphorical sentences in the text, any true belief based on literal interpretation will plausibly have some bad companion in the form of a belief based on a literal interpretation of a metaphorical sentence. Such a person may of course believe many truths. But the epistemic price for her fundamentalism may be that she knows next to nothing.)

We leave it to others to decide how much this simple case resembles an actual process by which some people arrive at their theological beliefs. The presence of a larger community engaged in joint interpretation of the text containing literal and metaphorical assertions will not help epistemologically, so long as the entire community could easily have mistaken metaphorical assertions for literal ones. It would, however, be a different matter if God directly guided the body of the church in certain matters of scriptural interpretation and then individuals based their scriptural beliefs on trust in that authority. Beliefs formed in this way would plausibly be the results of rather different token belief-forming processes than those that rely on the happenstance of private interpretation, and so the possible presence of the latter will not serve as bad companions for the former (see Aquinas on the 'habit of faith', *ST* II–II q.5 a.1, and discussion in Hawthorne 2013).

There is also an extra potential disanalogy with the testimony case. In cases where one gains knowledge by testimony, there is often a possibility that one will mishear the testifier and arrive at a false belief. Imagine that Billy is talking with John on the telephone, and John utters the sentence 'I am not in Oxford today'. If the phone line is unreliable and there is a chance that the line momentarily cuts out just as John utters 'not', then there is a chance that all Billy will hear is 'I am in Oxford today' and thereby form the false belief that John is in Oxford. But, assuming the line functions properly throughout the conversation, it seems absurd to say that Billy cannot know that John is not in Oxford.

This points to the need for the additional SIMILARITY constraint on knowledge. Errors in nearby worlds are compatible with knowledge if they are the products of sufficiently dissimilar belief-forming processes. This is exactly what is going on in the phone conversation between Billy and John: in the case where Billy comes to know from the conversation that John is not in Oxford, the belief-forming process is one that, among other things, puts Billy in a position to know what John said. This is a very different process to that in the case where the line cuts out at 'not', which leads to Billy's false belief, and which does not even make available to Billy basic knowledge of what John was saying on the other end of the line.

SIMILARITY will, by contrast, be hard-pressed to explain how the interpreter of our text arrives at knowledge in those cases where she forms true beliefs: this is because it is not guaranteed that the interpreter's belief-forming process in the good case is one which enables her to come to know which sentences in the text are literal assertions, and which are metaphorical. (If she already knew what the text was saying, then she could come to know which sentences were the literal ones. But in the absence of a belief-forming process that allows her to know which sentences are literal, she will also find a belief-forming process that is relevantly dissimilar to the process in bad cases to be unavailable to her.) Not every process that issues in true belief is a knowledge-producing process, and it seems clear that there are at least some cases resembling our interpreter of sacred texts where, even though the interpreter gets everything right, her beliefs are plagued by bad companions.

## Similarity: The Plurality of Religions

One might attempt a variation on the sceptical argument in the 'Sensitivity Arguments' section as follows. Given that environmental factors (including the beliefs of one's parents and surrounding community) largely determine what a person believes, there would seem to be cause for scepticism on the grounds that one could easily have been born into a different environment where one's parents and interlocutors propound different beliefs. It seems natural to conclude from this that one could easily have formed false beliefs by a similar process, where the process in question is that of accepting the beliefs of one's immediate community. Thus, Close Worlds and Similarity seem to imply that even if one happens to be born into an environment that produces true beliefs, those beliefs will have bad companions (see Goldberg 2014 for discussion of arguments of this kind).

We should not be too quick to count all of the possibilities just gestured at as containing bad companions. Consider by analogy mundane knowledge of the future. We know we will eat this evening. Now there are people who before this evening will get murdered out of the blue or die of brain aneurisms with no warning. While there is a natural sense in which we are disposed to assent to 'I could have easily been one of them', the criterion for closeness connected to bad companionship must be more demanding, at least if we are to be non-sceptics about mundane beliefs about the future. These cases will not count, then, as close in the epistemologically relevant sense. But if the beliefs of those people do not count as bad companions, why should beliefs of other religious communities count as bad companions? There is a risk that the theological sceptic will deploy a lax criterion of closeness that if used more widely would generate widespread scepticism. In short, it is not clear at all that the argument does not suffer from the same basic flaw as sensitivity, namely by relying on possibilities that are too distant to be epistemologically relevant.

Further, even granting that the cases are close, it is not clear that they pass the similarity test for bad companionship. Granted there is an obvious resemblance between the good and bad cases here: in each, one forms a belief in response to the prevalent beliefs in one's environment. But to think that this suffices to make the bad cases bad companions to the good would be to ignore the need for fine-grained comparisons between the token belief-forming processes: merely identifying a general category like 'deference to one's parents' will not suffice to establish the needed similarity.

The latter approach, which is to be rejected, is akin to denying that true beliefs formed on the basis of perception are knowledge in cases where there is some nearby circumstance where a false belief is formed on the basis of perception. But a nearby false belief that is formed by *some* perceptual method isn't necessarily a barrier to knowledge: suppose there is a copy of *War and Peace* on the coffee table, and Sally looks at it from the side and concludes that *War and Peace* is long after seeing the size of the book. Suppose moreover that there is a nearby possibility where she doesn't see the book's profile but instead opens to the table of contents and looks at the page count. If the book's typesetter was careless with the table of contents and listed the index as starting on page 54, then Sally could easily have formed the false belief that *War and Peace* is not long by looking at the table of contents.

This, however, is irrelevant to whether she knows by looking at the book's profile. Even though both her actual true belief and her nearby false belief are formed by broadly visual processes, this is not sufficient to establish relevant similarity. The token belief-forming process of Sally's looking at the table of contents is intuitively very dissimilar from the token belief-forming process of Sally's looking at the book's profile, and this dissimilarity guarantees that Sally is not prevented from knowing by a careless typesetter when she does not even open the book.

The argument from religious pluralism should fare even worse than an argument for the conclusion that Sally does not know in the case described above. The token causal processes by which people in rival religious communities arrive at their beliefs are likely to be at least as dissimilar as the token causal process that leads to Sally believing that *War and Peace* is long on the basis of looking at its profile is from the token causal process that would have led her to the belief that it is not long if she had looked at the table of contents instead (see Dunaway MS for more on the relationship between the aetiology of beliefs and the epistemologically relevant similarity relations between token processes).

## Closure: Counterfactuals and Evil

Assuming Closure, if one possesses knowledge that entails an answer to a question, then one is in a position to knowledgeably answer that question (at least assuming suitable deductive competence). For example, if one knows one has hands and the fact that one has hands entails that one is not a brain in a vat, then knowing that one has hands entails that one is in a position to know whether one is a brain in a vat. Even if one did not know that one is not a brain in a vat already, one could in principle come to arrive at such knowledge by deduction.

Let us make a few more quick observations about the brain-in-a-vat example just given. Competent deduction from the fact that one has hands may not be the most common or natural way to come to know that one is not a brain in a vat. But one should not think either that in order to know that one has hands one must have already come to know that one is not a brain in a vat. After all, one might come to know that one has hands even if one had never even considered wild sceptical hypotheses.

This structural observation has application to theological settings. As a case in point we will take the problem of evil. First, consider a warm-up example.

Suppose a community believes some former people become tigers in later stages of their existence. They believe further that some of these people take on the form of invisible tigers and that, indeed, there are always invisible tigers right in front of us. (One Javanese population has beliefs along these lines concerning a supposed were-tiger named Buyut Cili—see Beatty 1999: 53–4). Now Jones, who has not considered any of this, forms the belief that if there were a tiger in front of him, he would flee (where the aetiology of this belief is pretty much what one would expect for a typical New Yorker). Suppose, moreover, that the world is one where beliefs about invisible tigers are all wrong, and could not easily have been true either. And while it is possible for a fleshy tiger to be right in front of him unnoticed (thanks to disguise, blindness, or whatever), that couldn't easily have happened either. Jones's belief has impeccable credentials—by our lights, it is pretty obviously a case of knowledge.

But the truth of the proposition that if Jones had a tiger in front of him he would flee entails the falsity of the proposition that Jones has an invisible tiger in front of him. (For since he does not flee, the truth of the tiger-religion would make for a counterfactual with a true antecedent and a false consequent. By standard counterfactual logic, including the 'strong centring' condition for counterfactuals as discussed in Lewis 1973, this entails the falsity of the counterfactual.) Given CLOSURE and Jones's knowledge that if there were a tiger in front of him he would flee, Jones is then in a position to know by deduction that the content of the tiger-religion is false. This example is an instance of a general pattern: very ordinary counterfactuals that do not encode religious ideology can nevertheless entail the falsity of various religious views. Moreover, if we are in an environment where we know these counterfactuals, then CLOSURE guarantees that we will be able to know the falsity of these religious hypotheses.

Let us now turn to the problem of evil itself. Suppose someone who had never considered the views of the Judaeo-Christian tradition encounters an awful crime scene. The person forms the counterfactual belief that if a good person had been able to prevent this crime, that person would have. Now suppose we are in a world where the Judaeo-Christian view is false and couldn't easily have been true. And while it is possible that ordinary fleshy people could have been good, and able to prevent the crime but had excellent reasons for not doing so, such possibilities are also rather distant in this case. Here, just as in the last case, the person's belief has impeccable credentials and counts as knowledge. But this person's knowledge entails that there is no omnibenevolent, omniscient being. (Again, the reason is the same as in the tiger-religion case: since no one did stop the crime, the truth of the Judaeo-Christian religion would make for a counterfactual with a true antecedent and false consequent, which by standard logic would make the counterfactual false.) And so, given CLOSURE, the person in such a situation is in a position to know the falsity of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. (Indeed the person's knowledge about evil logically entails the falsity of that tradition—this suggests to us that the commonly made distinction between the 'logical' and 'evidential' problems of evil is not particularly helpful.)

The person's counterfactual belief is not expressed using the ideology of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. But as before, we have a situation where a very mundane counterfactual entails that the religion is false. Moreover, as we have emphasized, there is a very strong case to the effect that the counterfactual is knowable in worlds where the Judaeo-Christian tradition is false. This kind of case shouldn't seem excessively threatening to someone who believes in God—after all, the deduction described above is only available to someone who is in a world where the Judaeo-Christian religion is false. (Similarly there is nothing especially threatening for the theist as such about granting that, were God not to exist, one could know that God does not exist. It should seem even more benign from the theist's perspective to grant that mundane counterfactual knowledge of the kind described above is available in such worlds.) But there are some theistic perspectives on evil which require one to be able to argue from a neutral position that there is no God on the basis of evil, and these are forced to deny either Closure or the existence of mundane counterfactual knowledge in such worlds. (Such strategies are found in Wykstra 1984 and Bergmann 2001; see Benton, Hawthorne, and Isaacs 2016 for critical discussion of those strategies as well as overlapping discussion of some of the ideas explored here.) Reflection on the soundness of the use of counterfactual knowledge to know the falsity of the tiger-religion described earlier suggests that these approaches needlessly overreach, even from a theistic perspective.

## Counter-Closure: Shaky Foundations

Counter-Closure—a slightly more tendentious idea than Closure—says that (roughly) one cannot get knowledge from unknown premises. It is easy to find myriad theological applications for this idea. Return to our fundamentalist from the 'Private Interpretation' section. Suppose a large chunk of the Bible is true but that the fundamentalist belief in any given sentence is based on the false belief that every sentence is the literal truth. Assuming Counter-Closure, it seems that the price of this false belief is that none of the true beliefs formed by reading the text count as knowledge. Further, all sorts of mundane non-religious beliefs about the world may be indicted by falsely believed and hence unknown religious foundations. For example, as a loved one leaves the house one might go on to base a belief that they will return on the false belief that it is a priority of God's to keep them safe. Even if one is in a position to know that they will return, one arguably fails to exercise this capacity by basing one's belief in a safe return on speculative theology. (Clearly, it is very easy to find all sorts of examples of cases where, assuming Counter-Closure, knowledge failure is induced by a faulty theological basis.)

## Knowledge-entailing States: Faith without Belief

In response to worries about the possibility of knowledge in the theological domain, some have responded by proposing that the central propositional attitude in a religious context—faith—does not require belief (see Howard-Snyder 2013). One attractive feature of this approach in the face of sceptical worries is that it leaves space for a cognitive life that is religiously serious yet does not violate any epistemic requirements if one is not in a position to know theological claims. In particular this approach respects the relationship between knowledge and belief envisaged in Normative Connections—if one ought to believe a proposition only if one is in a position to know it, then if faith requires belief and one is not in a position to know theological claims, faith will be epistemically prohibited as well. Thus divorcing faith from belief (which need not involve holding that faith is compatible with outright disbelief) promises to protect faith from epistemic criticism if knowledge is difficult or impossible to come by.

Suppose, then, that one can rationally have faith without being in a position to know the relevant propositions (thus in the envisaged scenario one is not in a position to rationally believe these propositions). One might think that the disconnect is highly local: one can have faith without knowledge but the rest of one's cognitive life is left intact. But if, as Knowledge-entailing States claims, knowledge is tied to myriad other notions, then the effects of the divorce will spread.

To take one example: suppose Tim has faith that God has told him to become a missionary. If we fill in the details of the case so that there is a God and God in fact told Tim to become a missionary, it is natural to say in this case that Tim's reason for becoming a missionary is that God has told him to do so. But given, as Knowledge-entailing States claims, that having *p* as a personal reason requires knowledge of *p*, God's directions will be unavailable as Tim's reason for becoming a missionary. For if even if Tim's faith is epistemically uncriticizable, it cannot on present assumptions be that Tim's reasons for becoming a missionary include that God told him to do so; Tim's faith is that of someone who isn't in a position know that God has issued the relevant directives (of course facts about God could be explanatory reasons why one does something, but they cannot, according to Knowledge-entailing States, be one's personal or motivating reasons for doing anything). It seems somewhat tragic to be deprived of using facts about God as one's reasons for acting.

In the faith-without-belief view, there will be additional examples of the absence of knowledge spreading to other areas of one's cognitive and practical life as well. If seeing that *p* requires that one knows that *p*, then someone who has faith that God works wonders in the world won't be able to see that God has worked wonders. Or again, plausibly one cannot be happy that *p* unless one knows that *p*. Then, someone with knowledgeless faith cannot be happy that there is a personal loving God even if there is one.

## IGNORANCE-ENTAILING STATES: RISK AND GOOD WILL

We have been focusing on some potentially negative ramifications of a failure to know that there is a God; these, we have been emphasizing, will constitute perhaps unwelcome consequences of a kind of faith that is knowledge-free. But it is also important to see that a failure to know may contribute positively to our religious lives: some other practical and epistemic states require the absence of knowledge. We offer a few illustrations of this theme.

Our first illustration is inspired by Kant's own discussion of the hiddenness of God. (Here we will gloss over difficult problems with elaborating the thesis that God is hidden in knowledge-theoretic terms: if one's evidence is just what one knows, then a superficial gloss on the hiddenness of God according to which there isn't great evidence that God exists will be unsatisfactory. For either one can know that God exists, or one cannot know. The former option appears to entail that hiddenness is false because the evidential probability on one's evidence that God exists will be 1; in the latter option, hiddenness directly implies scepticism. This would be unfortunate for hiddenness theorists because many contemporary theists have been sympathetic to the idea that God is hidden but would not grant a claim that directly implies scepticism in this way. No doubt some will lean on a perceptual gloss instead—one can, after all, know that something exists even if one can't perceive it—but more will be done to work this out. We presumably do not employ perception to come to know the law of excluded middle, but there presumably is not an analogous hiddenness phenomenon for logical truths.) It is a common thought that morally praiseworthy action not only requires doing the morally required action but also doing it for the right reason. Kant is an extreme example of this, where he held that only actions done from the motivation to do one's duty have moral worth. If the only reasons one can appropriately act for are things one can know, then by granting that one can know theological claims, morally good action may be difficult or even impossible.

Kant claims something along these lines when he says that if 'God and eternity with their awful majesty [stood] unceasingly before our eyes', then 'most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear …and the moral worth of actions … would not exist at all' (1997: 121–2). According to one implementation of this idea, it will be at the very least psychologically very difficult to act from duty if among the things one knows are claims such as *those who act immorally will be eternally punished*, or *everyone who performs right actions will receive eternal reward*. If one knows these claims, then it is at least appropriate for these claims to be one's reason for action. When faced with an opportunity to help an old lady across the street, the threat of eternal punishment is available as a reason for helping. Moreover, it will be an especially psychologically salient reason: someone who genuinely knows that they are under the threat of eternal punishment will be hard-pressed to ignore this consideration when reasoning about whether to help. But in doing so they will deprive their action of genuine moral worth. The presence of good will, at least in psychologically realistic individuals, may well be an ignorance-entailing state: perhaps the only way to secure the conclusion that we do act for the right reasons is to deny that we know what the eternal consequences of our actions will be.

A second illustration of this idea relies on the connection between knowledge and risk alluded to earlier. Suppose that, as we suggested in the 'Structural Connections' section, risking that *p* is incompatible with knowing that not-*p*. Then any states that require the presence of risk will also be incompatible with knowledge. Moreover, a wide range of states that we think of as virtuous are, prima facie at least, states that do require the presence of risk. For example, because of its connection to risk, courage is naturally understood as requiring the absence of knowledge: one cannot courageously enter a battle if one is not risking anything by doing so. And one cannot risk that one would lose one's life in a fight (for instance) if when entering one knew that one would not die. Some have thought that the value of faith lies partly in the fact that it is a courageous cognitive act (cf. Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* where Abraham's faith is courageous and therefore praiseworthy precisely because he cannot know what to do because of the contradiction between religious and ethical requirements on his action). Rejecting theological scepticism makes this kind of praiseworthy cognitive act unavailable.

It is also somewhat natural to think that the kind of reliance distinctive of trust is one that includes risk, but we don't intend to take a stand on that here. Even if trust doesn't require risk, it is arguable that *commendable* trust does. Similarly it is arguable that hoping that *p* requires at least some risk that not-*p* and hence requires not knowing that *p*. Insofar as one wishes to make these ignorance-entailing states available in practical and religious life, one may be forced to deny that we can know theological claims.

## Normative Connections: Dogmatism

Let us return to the knowledge–action connections, namely:

> Kripke: If *A* knows that taking an action (i.e. any action) of type *T* leads to consequence *C*, and *A* wishes above all else to avoid *C* (i.e. this is the only relevant issue), then *A* should resolve now not to take any action of type *T*.
>
> Companion Kripke: If *A* knows that taking any action of type *T* leads to consequence *C* and doesn't know of any action that is not of type *T* that it leads to consequence *C*, and *A* wishes above all else to secure *C*, then *A* should resolve to perform an action of type *T*.

As Kripke is aware, the connection he cites yields a prima facie case for dogmatic resolutions (on the part of a knower) to ignore powerful counterevidence. The idea is that if one knows *p* then (at least if one knows one believes *p*) one knows that one has a true belief that *p.* But if one really wants a true belief that *p* and knows that paying attention to powerful counterevidence will induce loss of belief, then it is natural to think that according to KRIPKE one should resolve not to pay attention to powerful counterevidence. The KRIPKE principle has particularly forceful application in the religious case. After all, when it comes to very ordinary beliefs it may be that by paying attention to powerful counterevidence one gains new true beliefs even if one loses an old true belief when counterevidence comes in (one will, at the very least, be able to know what the counterevidence was). And there will not be anything so special about the original true belief that makes it especially important to secure it. But in the religious case it is plausible that certain people care more than anything else about retaining a true belief in God and would be more than happy to sacrifice the opportunity to learn about other subject matters in order to retain it.

Here is one straightforward application of COMPANION KRIPKE to this kind of case. To make this especially dramatic, let us imagine that someone who knows that theism is true is given the opportunity of taking a pill that she knows ensures that, come what may, she will believe that theism is true. Given COMPANION KRIPKE and a suitable valuation priority for believing in God, it seems that the person should take the pill—taking the pill is the only action she knows of that will produce the consequence of continued belief in God, and this is by hypothesis what she wants above everything else.

The same point can be made a little more precise by running the whole discussion within the context of a decision theory where the likelihood of any outcome is a matter of likelihood conditional on what one knows. This will also allow us to take care of ways in which KRIPKE and COMPANION KRIPKE need further refinement. For example, suppose one knows that act *T* will lead to what one wishes above all to avoid and that not doing *T* will almost certainly lead to that horrible outcome and moreover will certainly generate a second bad side effect. The decision theory will tell one to do *T* but the unrefined KRIPKE principle will not. None of this should matter much in the contexts we are discussing.

As Kripke is aware, these kinds of considerations can form the basis of a quite compelling sceptical argument. For it seems that we should not take the dogmatism pill. But if we know that there is a God and the KRIPKE and COMPANION KRIPKE principles are along the right lines (and it seems that they, or some successors refined in the direction outlined above, are) then we should take the pill. So, by modus tollens, we do not know there is a God. (It is worth considering the same argument in connection with heretic-burning. If Giordano Bruno's inquisitors knew that he would go to hell were he not to recant and knew that he wouldn't recant without purging by fire, then, given the principles and/or a suitably low utility assignment to hell, purging by fire is the recommended action. No matter what our religious orientation, we should perhaps revisit the question whether the inquisitors knew).

## CONCLUSION

There are various other candidate structural features that might ramify in important ways in the religious case. Let us briefly mention two. First, many philosophers think that 'know' is a context-sensitive verb that expresses different relations in different contexts of use. As the idea is typically developed, there are certain contexts in which 'know' expresses a relation to a proposition that can only be achieved by someone who passes incredibly high epistemic standards, where in other contexts, 'know' expresses a relation that is far less demanding. Proponents of the idea then articulate a mechanism by which the standards relevant to a context can vary. Proposals along these lines tend, as yet, to be pretty crude, but most make use of one or both of two mechanisms suggested by Lewis. One is that attending to sceptical possibilities tends to drive the standards up. Another is that insofar as one is in a context where there is a lot at stake as to whether *p* is true, that also tends to drive the standards up. Even in this vague form it is easy to see how, in rough outlines, such ideas will apply to the religious case. For example, the theist might contend that in the context of problem of evil discussions, the atheist's attention has been drawn to the 'sceptical' possibility that horrendous evils have an undetected higher purpose and that this puts the atheist in a context where he cannot claim 'If there were a good guy who could have prevented this, he would have'. Meanwhile, many religious questions (though certainly not all theological nuances) are paradigmatically 'high stakes' and so, assuming the second mechanism, one would expect the standards for 'know' to be high in contexts where those questions are explicitly under consideration. For better or worse, however, we feel these mechanisms need fuller development in order for their application to religious belief to be a very profitable venture (the effect of stakes has also been prominent in discussion of 'subject-sensitive invariantism'. For more on why the relevant discussion of stakes has been hopelessly underdeveloped, see Anderson and Hawthorne MS).

Many discussions of knowledge emphasize that knowledge has a further structural feature in its intimate connection to the absence of 'defeaters': when undefeated defeaters are present for belief in *p*, knowledge of *p* is unattainable. (According to this way of theorizing, one cannot know that a red ball is in fact red on the basis of perception if one learns that the ball has red lights shining on it and would as a result look red even if it were white. Knowledge of the lighting provides a 'defeater' that blocks the path to knowledge of the ball's colour via perception.) When it comes to religious belief, numerous alleged sources of defeat for these beliefs have been proposed: for instance, the facts about religious pluralism discussed in earlier sections might together be said to constitute a defeater. Likewise, facts about the distribution of evil in the world, or the evolutionary origins of religious belief, might be defeaters. This way of speaking is common in epistemology, and any discussion of scepticism should mention it.

We think, however, that the need for defeat as an additional constraint on knowledge is not obvious. Many alleged cases of defeat can be assimilated under headings that have already appeared in our discussion. Some paradigmatic cases can be accounted for by CLOSE WORLDS and SIMILARITY: in many cases where I learn that an object that appears red is under red lighting, and would appear red even if it wasn't, the belief that it is red has a bad companion: either it is actually false, or false in nearby worlds where it is formed by a relevantly similar perceptual process. Hence we already have laid out the resources for explaining why one can't know in these cases. In other cases there is a pretty good case to be made that knowledge is present before and after the so-called defeater. The alleged defeater may merely make it harder to know that one knows or instead reveal one to be someone who would cling on to the belief in a setting where one didn't know, and in that sense reveal that one has dicey dispositions. Of course friends of defeat will want to say more than this, but in our view current accounts of defeat are so jerry-mandered or impoverished that we cannot apply them usefully to the religious case.

We have articulated a certain degree of pessimism about the fruits of two candidate structural features of knowledge—context dependence and defeat. At any rate, we are not in a position make helpful contributions to the epistemology of theology by drawing on structural insights of that sort. That said, we await new and more nuanced theoretical models of these phenomena. Discussions of scepticism come to life when conducted within the contexts of such models and will likely languish if they content themselves with a methodology dominated by reliance on intuitions about cases.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## CHAPTER 19

# DISAGREEMENT AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THEOLOGY

NATHAN L. KING AND THOMAS KELLY

## Introduction

Philosophers of religion and theologians have long discussed the following question:

Q1: Should awareness of disagreement about religious questions lead a theist to lose confidence in his or her own religious convictions?

This question spawned a vast literature in the 1980s and 1990s—a literature that both anticipated and partially inspired an explosion of more recent work in epistemology on the topic of disagreement.[1] In this chapter, we seek to glean insights from this more recent work in epistemology and apply what can be applied to the topic of religious disagreement. We are particularly interested in the prospects for vindicating an affirmative answer to Q1 by appealing to so-called *conciliationist* views about disagreement that currently enjoy significant popularity among epistemologists, and in some of the obstacles that arise for that project. Given that much of our focus will be on Q1, it is worth making explicit two ways in which taking this question as a starting point inevitably tends to colour subsequent inquiry.

First, note that Q1, though a fair and legitimate question, is hardly a *neutral* question with respect to philosophically interesting issues in the vicinity. Q1 raises the possibility that religious believers should revise their views in response to the diversity of opinion that obtains with respect to religious questions, without raising the analogous possibility that the same facts ought to make religious non-believers less confident of their own views. Moreover, inasmuch as Q1 makes salient the possibility that theists ought to revise their views in response to what other people think, the only possibility broached is that they should *lose* confidence in their prior opinions. That is, Q1 obscures the possibility that a theist might actually *gain* rational support for some of her religious convictions via her awareness of the distribution of opinion on some religious matters (for an extended discussion of this possibility, see Kelly 2011). In these respects, it is helpful to contrast Q1 with the following, more general question:

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[1] For a representative sampling of work on religious disagreement, see Gutting 1982; Alston 1991: Ch. 7; van Inwagen 1996; Hick 1997; Plantinga 2000: Ch. 13; Quinn and Meeker 2000; and Hick 2004. For guides to this literature, see Quinn 2005; King 2008; and Basinger 2010. For a representative sampling of more recent and general work on the topic of disagreement within epistemology, see Feldman and Warfield 2010, Christensen and Lackey 2013, and Machuca 2013. For a book-length discussion of religious disagreement that is informed by recent work in general epistemology, see Kraft 2012.

Q2: How should an awareness of the distribution of opinion with respect to religious questions affect a person's views on those questions?

Q2 suggests a broader range of possible answers than Q1. It carries the added advantage of raising the possibility that it is not only theists, but also atheists and agnostics, who might have reason to revise their views in the light of facts about the distribution of opinion. Thus, though most of what follows will focus on the epistemic standing of religious *belief* (and will therefore address Q1), it should be borne in mind that to some extent this approach sacrifices neutrality and generality in order to allow for a more focused inquiry, and that the issue examined here must ultimately be part of a larger discussion.

Second, Q1 concerns the possibility that theists should revise their religious views in response to disagreement, without in any way addressing the *prior status* of those views. No doubt, many of those who have argued that disagreement about religious matters gives the theist good reason to lose confidence in her religious beliefs have also thought that such beliefs would lack respectable rational credentials *even in the absence of disagreement*. Typically, however, those who have argued that Q1 should be answered in the affirmative have not appealed to any such substantive judgements about the prior status of religious beliefs. Rather, their claim is that even if the theist would be justified in holding her religious convictions in the absence of disagreement, the theist is not justified once the facts about disagreement are taken into account. On this view, our awareness of disagreement is *sufficient* to make confident religious belief unreasonable or unwarranted. In short, the idea is that religious disagreement provides a powerful *defeater* for religious belief, something that can undermine whatever rational credentials such belief would otherwise enjoy. In fact, recent epistemology has devoted a great deal of attention to the circumstances in which an awareness of disagreement can play this defeating role. It is to this literature that we now turn.

## CONCILIATIONISM

Clearly, learning that another person disagrees with something that you believe does not *always* provide you with a reason to revise your view. For example, learning that a young child adamantly denies that 2 + 2 = 4 should inspire no revision at all. It is equally clear that learning of a disagreement sometimes *does* provide you with a reason to change your mind. To proceed again by example: if you are a student who has just begun to study biology, and you discover that you disagree with hundreds of experts about the cause of photosynthesis, it is time to revise your view.

Once we move beyond such clear-cut cases, however, the import of disagreement is itself a contentious matter. Among contributors to the epistemology of disagreement literature, it is common to draw a rough but serviceable distinction between *conciliatory* and *steadfast* views. Proponents of conciliatory views tend to see the phenomenon of disagreement as mandating relatively extensive revisions to our opinions about many controversial matters. In contrast, steadfast views are relatively hospitable to maintaining one's opinions in the face of disagreement. Since it is conciliatory views that are most likely to deliver an affirmative answer to our guiding question Q1, let us begin by focusing on them.

Although conciliationists see disagreement as calling for significant belief revision in a relatively wide range of cases, they will allow that you can rationally retain your view in certain circumstances. In particular, conciliationists will allow that you can rationally retain your view in cases in which you have some special reason to think that the person with whom you disagree is more likely to have made a mistake (presumably, this condition is satisfied in the case of the mathematically challenged child mentioned above). Moreover, even in a case in which you find yourself in a disagreement with a person who is ordinarily just as reliable as you are, conciliationists will allow that you can rationally retain your view if you know that (e.g.) the other person has arrived at his view while inebriated or under the influence of mind-distorting drugs, while you've arrived at yours in a state of sobriety and clear-headedness. In such a case, you have evidence that you are more likely to be correct that is *independent* of the disagreement, and independent of your original reasons for holding your view. According to conciliationists, evidence of this sort suffices to make it rational for you to stick to your guns. However, conciliationists characteristically claim that such evidence is also *necessary*. The thought that independent evidence is *not* necessary in such cases, conciliationists say, would license the following sort of reasoning: 'The other person believes *p*. But inasmuch as the evidence supports not-*p* (which I believe) I can conclude that she is the one who has made a mistake on this occasion.' Conciliationists reject such reasoning as question-begging. This leads them to claim that, in the absence of any independent reason to think that you are right, the discovery that others disagree rationally requires significant belief revision. This emphasis on the importance of having independent reasons to discount the views of those with whom one disagrees is at the heart of conciliatory approaches to disagreement (cf. Christensen 2009).

One motivation for conciliatory views is that they deliver what strike many as the intuitively compelling verdicts about certain concrete examples. For example, consider the following case from David Christensen (2009: 757):

> Mental Math: You and your friend have been going out to dinner together regularly for many years. You always tip 20% and split the check (with each person's share rounded up to the nearest dollar), and you each do the requisite calculation in your head upon receiving the check. Most of the time you have agreed, but in the instances

> when you have not, you have taken out a calculator to check; over the years, you and your friend have been right in these situations equally often. Tonight, you figure out that your shares are $43, and become quite confident of this. But then your friend announces that she is quite confident that your shares are $45. Neither of you has had more wine or coffee, and you do not feel (nor does your friend appear) especially tired or especially perky.

Intuitively, under such conditions you ought to abandon your belief that your share is $43 (or move to a middling credence regarding this claim), and increase your confidence that your share is $45. Conciliationists note that their view delivers this intuitive verdict, and think that the verdict will generalize widely. Thus, they argue for a strong analogy between cases like Mental Math and disagreements that arise over such topics as morality, politics, science, and religion. This casuistic argument, they claim, gains theoretical support from the idea that steadfast views allow the problematic kind of question-begging reasoning mentioned earlier. Moreover, it is sometimes argued that steadfast views would license the *repeated* use of such reasoning in dismissing the opinions of one's peers—a result that would make steadfast views border on absurdity (see Elga 2007).

Consider also the way in which one might try to motivate conciliatory views by appealing to examples involving inanimate measuring devices. For example, suppose that I form my beliefs about the ambient temperature in some room by consulting my thermometer. (To avoid complications, we can suppose that I have no other access to the temperature of the room. Perhaps I am in an adjacent room, looking at my thermometer through a window, and I know that the temperature of the room that I am in is not reliably correlated with the temperature of the room in which the thermometer is located.) I have no reason to think that anything is amiss with my thermometer, so the beliefs that I form in this way are perfectly reasonable. However, I then discover that the reading returned by my thermometer is inconsistent with the reading returned by your thermometer, which is also clearly visible in the adjacent room. Unless I have some special reason to trust my thermometer over yours, it seems as though I should be agnostic about whose thermometer is correct. Certainly, it would not be defensible to favour the reading of my thermometer simply because that's what *my* thermometer says, or because that is what I justifiably believed before I learned about your thermometer. Moreover, the same seems to be true even if your thermometer really is the one that is malfunctioning on this occasion, and mine is functioning perfectly. So long as I have no independent evidence that that is what is taking place, the mere fact that my thermometer is the one that's functioning properly on this occasion does not justify favouring what it reports over what yours reports. But, one might think, what holds for thermometers holds for believers as well: when I find myself in a disagreement with someone else, then, in the absence of some independent reason for thinking that I am the one who is correct, I should suspend judgement, even if my original opinion was fully reasonable before I became aware of the disagreement.

For our purposes, a notable feature of these examples is the way in which they suggest that even beliefs with seemingly impeccable rational credentials can be undermined when a certain kind of conflict emerges. Suppose that in Mental Math, you were the one who arrived at the correct answer via an impeccable calculation. In that case, it is very natural to credit you with *knowing* the correct answer prior to learning that your friend arrived at a different answer. Similarly, if I arrived at my original belief about the temperature by relying on a thermometer that was in fact functioning perfectly, then it is natural to credit me with knowing the temperature prior to the discovery that your thermometer says something else. In the preceding section, we noted that those who answer Q1 in the affirmative see religious disagreement as a *defeater* for religious belief: that is, they maintain that such belief is unreasonable *given* the kind of disagreement about religious matters that we find, even if such beliefs would be reasonable in the absence of disagreement. Examples such as Mental Math and the thermometer case seem to provide good models for what such theorists have in mind. For these examples seem to show that the emergence of a certain kind of conflict is enough to make it rationally mandatory to give up one's belief, even if that same belief would have qualified as knowledge if no such conflict had emerged. Indeed, even for those who take seriously the possibility of theological knowledge, it is natural to think that the epistemic standing of beliefs arrived at via flawless arithmetical reasoning or via reliance on accurate thermometers generally compares favourably with the epistemic standing of beliefs to the effect that a given theological position is correct. But if knowledge that has been arrived at via flawless arithmetical reasoning or via reliance on accurate thermometers can nevertheless be undermined by the emergence of disagreement, then (one might think) surely the epistemic credentials of one's theological opinions can be undermined by the knowledge that seemingly competent others have arrived at incompatible views.

A conciliationist who answers Q1 in the affirmative will thus see the case of religious belief as relevantly analogous to Mental Math and the conflicting thermometer case. However, as we will see, even if one shares the view that suspension of judgement is called for in the latter two cases, there are any number of ways in which one might resist the invitation to draw the same conclusion about the case of religious belief.

## RATIONAL PLURALISM

One general strategy for resisting the conciliationist thought that you should lose confidence in your controversial opinions involves appealing to a *permissive* conception of rationality. It is characteristic of epistemic permissivists to see the norms of rationality as at least somewhat lax and undemanding, in a way that allows for a significant range of conflicting answers to disputed questions to count as fully reasonable or justified. It is uncontroversial that, although the members of an inconsistent set of views cannot all be *true*, they might nevertheless all be *reasonably believed*, provided that those who believe them differ sufficiently in the evidence that they have to go on. Epistemic permissivists go beyond this uncontroversial thought and insist that the standards of rationality are liberal enough to allow for a rational diversity of opinion even in cases where other theorists see no room for it. For example, a permissivist might insist that the norms of rationality are liberal enough to allow for the possibility that the parties to a disagreement can each be fully rational even if they possess the *same* total evidence, or even if their total evidence includes the information that they have similarly situated peers who have arrived at incompatible views. Consider, for example, the view endorsed by Gideon Rosen in the following passage:

> It should be obvious that reasonable people can disagree, even when confronted with a single body of evidence. When a jury or court is divided in a difficult case, the mere fact of disagreement does not mean that someone is being unreasonable. Paleontologists disagree about what killed the dinosaurs. And while it is possible that most of the parties to this dispute are irrational, this need not be the case. To the contrary, it would appear to be a fact of epistemic life that a careful review of the evidence does not guarantee consensus, even among thoughtful and otherwise rational investigators.
>
> (Rosen 2001: 71–2)

Here, Rosen suggests that palaeontologists who accept rival theories about the dinosaurs on the basis of shared evidence might be fully reasonable in steadfastly maintaining their views, despite being aware that their views are not shared (and indeed, are explicitly rejected) by a significant number of their professional colleagues. But, one might think, what holds for the palaeontologists holds also for at least some theists, atheists, and agnostics, and also for religious believers who differ in their more specific theological commitments. Thus, an epistemic permissivist might answer Q1 in the negative, on the grounds that many, most, or even all disputed religious questions constitute *permissive cases*.

Whether a permissive conception of rationality is viable is a hotly debated issue within contemporary epistemology. Much of this debate has centred on the status of the so-called *Uniqueness Thesis* (on the Uniqueness Thesis, see especially White 2005; for a recent exchange, see Kelly 2013 and White 2013). According to the Uniqueness Thesis, for any given body of evidence and any proposition, there is at most one fully rational attitude that any believer can take towards that proposition given that evidence. The Uniqueness Thesis is frequently endorsed by conciliationists (see Feldman 2007; Christensen 2007; Matheson 2009). Notice that if the Uniqueness Thesis is correct, then the situation that Rosen takes to obtain among the palaeontologists is in fact incoherent: given that the palaeontologists share a body of evidence, this is enough to ensure a uniformity of opinion if they respond to that evidence in the rational way. Moreover, even if the Uniqueness Thesis is false, and there are cases in which a given body of evidence can render a range of opinion fully reasonable, it is a further step to claim, with Rosen, that there are cases in which believers can *knowingly* disagree with one another on the basis of a single body of evidence while remaining fully rational (cf. Ballantyne and Coffman 2012). Given the unsettled nature of these debates, it might appear that anyone who appeals to the putative possibility of reasonable pluralism about religious questions in this context is giving a significant hostage to fortune.

However, notice that the picture endorsed by Rosen is much stronger than what is needed by someone who answers Q1 in the negative on the grounds that a steadfast response to religious disagreement is licensed by considerations having to do with the possibility of reasonable pluralism. In the passage above, Rosen is concerned with a very special case: a case in which the parties to the dispute share *all* of their evidence (i.e. the total evidence that is possessed by any party to the dispute is the same as the total evidence possessed by every other party). Perhaps there are some real-life cases of disagreement that at least closely approximate this ideal. The examples mentioned by Rosen provide plausible candidates: cases in which the members of a jury are presented with the same evidence in court, or cases in which the members of a professional scientific community end up with the same evidence in virtue of following disciplinary norms that encourage any member of the community to share relevant evidence with every other member of the community (although even here, questions might be raised about just how closely such cases approximate the ideal). Moreover—and significantly for our purposes—the kinds of examples that are used to motivate conciliatory views about disagreement are naturally understood as cases in which the parties who end up with conflicting opinions have the same evidence to go on. For example, in Mental Math, the individuals who ultimately arrive at different answers presumably have access to the same basic information that is relevant to the calculation (e.g. they know the amount of the total bill that is to be divided into equal shares, as well as the number of people among whom it is be divided).

There are, then, at least some disagreements that are naturally understood on the model of different individuals drawing different conclusions on the basis of a body of shared evidence. But how appropriate is this model for understanding typical *religious* disagreements?

We think that typical religious disagreements are *not* best understood in terms of this model, and that this fact complicates attempts to argue for an affirmative answer to Q1. First, the arguments and considerations that are offered for and against many disputed religious claims are notoriously numerous and complex. For this reason alone, it will in practice be difficult for two reflective individuals to share exactly the same evidence with respect to such claims, even when attention is restricted to the kind of evidence that is at least *in principle* publicly available, such as arguments that one person might offer to another. Moreover, many religious believers claim that their religious convictions are grounded at least in part on religious experiences or incommunicable insights, token events that cannot literally be *shared* in the same way that arguments can. Should such experiences be excluded from counting as evidence, on the grounds that they fail to satisfy the conditions for being evidence in some honorific sense? In that case, it seems like a religious believer might reply that it is uninteresting that an argument for an affirmative answer to Q1 can be constructed once the very factors that she herself takes to play an essential role in justifying her religious convictions are excluded. (Indeed, she might add that at this point the appeal to interpersonal disagreement is superfluous, since she herself would agree that her religious convictions would not be justified in the absence of the relevant experiences.)

To say that it is extremely likely that there will be at least some differences in the evidence possessed by different individuals with respect to controversial religious questions is not to deny that their evidence will include common elements. For example, given that Q1 concerns the significance of religious disagreement for individuals who are *aware* of such disagreement, the knowledge that there is disagreement about religious questions is itself a significant piece of common ground. But even with respect to more fine-grained information about the diversity of religious opinion, individuals will generally differ significantly in the information that they possess. After all, it is not simply that one knows an existential proposition to the effect that there is disagreement about, say, God's existence; rather, one also knows propositions to the effect that such-and-such a particular individual believes that God exists, while another is convinced that God does not exist, and so on. For some of these individuals, one might have information that bears on their reliability, information that is itself relevant to the epistemic probability that what they believe is true. Thus, even at the level of sociological facts about the distribution of religious opinion—facts that any conciliatory view will see as relevant to questions about what we should believe—the information that is available to any particular individual will be quite complex and highly sensitive to how he or she is embedded in the world. For that reason, it is extremely likely that any two individuals will differ in the evidence of this kind that they possess. (Again, contrast the Mental Math case, in which the distribution of opinion in the relevant two-person population is common knowledge among the two friends, and in which it is also stipulated to be common knowledge that the two have equally good track records with respect to the relevant kind of calculation.)

In the epistemology of disagreement literature, a great deal of attention has been devoted to disagreements between subjects who acknowledge each other as *epistemic peers*—that is, subjects who (i) are aware of the same arguments and evidence relevant to the target proposition, and (ii) are equals with respect to their capacities and dispositions for responding rationally to evidence (for similar definitions, see Kelly 2005; Feldman 2007; Matheson 2009; Christensen 2009; Elgin 2010; Goldman 2010; and Kornblith 2010). If we are right in what we have said thus far, then typical religious disagreements seem like particularly bad candidates for peer disagreements in this sense, even compared to many other, actual, real-world disagreements (for a sceptical discussion of how many actual disagreements are plausibly understood as peer disagreements, see King 2012).

If our claims in this section are substantially correct, what follows? First, one who defends a steadfast response to religious disagreement on the grounds that a significant diversity of views about religion can be fully reasonable is *not* committed to denying the Uniqueness Thesis. That is, even if it is true, as a point of general epistemology, that no single body of evidence could justify a range of incompatible views about religious questions, this is perfectly consistent with the possibility that the world contains many fully rational Christians, Muslims, Jews, atheists, and agnostics, simply because different individuals will typically differ significantly in the evidence that they possess. Similarly, even if there is some true conciliatory principle according to which *epistemic peers* are rationally required to give up their views upon discovering that they disagree, *that* principle will not be a useful premise in an argument for an affirmative answer to question Q1; for individuals who differ in their views about religious matters will in practice not satisfy the conditions for epistemic peerhood.

Crucially, however, it would be a mistake to conclude from this that, when it comes to religious beliefs, the phenomenon of disagreement is epistemically irrelevant, or that there is some straightforward route to a *negative* answer to Q1. Indeed, as we will see in the next section, the fact that individuals will typically differ significantly in the evidence that they possess with respect to religious questions is a point which the conciliationist might very well attempt to turn to her advantage.

## Disagreement and the Varieties of Higher-Order Evidence

A major theme in recent work on the epistemology of disagreement is the distinction between *first-order evidence* and *higher-order evidence*. Intuitively, first-order evidence E is evidence that bears directly on some target proposition or hypothesis H. Higher-order evidence is evidence about the character of *E* itself, or about subjects' capacities and dispositions for responding rationally to E. Suppose that a trained meteorologist carefully surveys the available meteorological data and concludes that *it will rain tomorrow*. Here, the meteorological data (E) is first-order evidence that bears on the hypothesis (H) that *it will rain tomorrow*. Now consider the fact that *the meteorologist arrived at the view that it will rain tomorrow on the basis of E*. This fact is higher-order evidence, inasmuch as it is evidence about the content and import of the original meteorological data E. In particular, given that the meteorologist is generally competent when it comes to assessing the relevant kind of evidence, the fact that she has arrived at the view that H on the basis of E is evidence for the epistemic proposition that *E supports H*. Moreover, in many contexts, the fact that the meteorologist arrived at the view that H on the basis of evidence E will count as evidence, not only for the epistemic proposition that *E supports H*, but also for the hypothesis itself, that is, *it will rain tomorrow*. This will be especially clear—and will be common ground among both conciliationists and anti-conciliationists—in cases in which a third party lacks access to the original meteorological evidence E (or is incompetent to assess that evidence) but does know that the meteorologist arrived at the verdict that *it will rain tomorrow* on its basis. In those circumstances, both concilationists and anti-conciliationists will agree that it makes sense for the third party to increase his credence that it will rain tomorrow, once he learns what the meteorologist has concluded. In effect, in these circumstances, one treats the fact that the meteorologist arrived at the belief that it will rain tomorrow as a kind of *proxy* for the meteorological evidence to which one lacks access, or which one is incompetent to assess (Kelly 2005). The general lesson is that higher-order evidence often serves as evidence that should make a difference not only to what you believe about the first-order evidence, but also to your beliefs about the world itself (Christensen 2010; Kelly 2010).

A conciliationist who is concerned to argue for an affirmative answer to Q1 might seek to exploit this point. In the last section, we noted that it is unlikely that individuals will share all of their evidence with respect to controversial religious questions. There, we suggested that this fact supports the thought that a range of incompatible views about religious questions might be fully reasonable, given the diverse epistemic situations in which individuals find themselves. However, the fact that individuals do not typically share their evidence with respect to such questions is also a point that the conciliationist might attempt to turn in his favour. For insofar as one is prepared to admit that some of those with whom one disagrees about religious questions are generally reasonable people, one should see their beliefs as a kind of evidence about what it is reasonable for them to believe given their epistemic situations, or as evidence that they have evidence that supports the truth of their views. The conciliationist, then, might argue that this gives you a reason to revise your own view in the direction of theirs, on the grounds that this is a case in which you have higher-order evidence that counts against your own view and in favour of theirs.

Indeed, when we bear in mind that higher-order evidence is evidence either about the character of first-order evidence or about subjects' capacities and dispositions for responding rationally to their first-order evidence, it is clear that there is a variety of kinds of higher-order evidence that is potentially relevant to the epistemic status of religious beliefs (see King 2016 for further discussion). This variety includes at least the following:

- *Evidence of unreliability*: Billions of people in the world hold beliefs about religious matters. And many of these beliefs are incompatible with others. At most one religious belief system is entirely correct. This suggests that many of those with opinions on religious topics either (a) have misleading evidence supporting their beliefs, or (b) have assessed non-misleading evidence inappropriately.
- *Difficulty in assessment*: Many of the grounds offered on behalf of religious views are difficult to assess. The difficulty of such assessment—and thus the probability of making mistakes—only increases when we move from single arguments to cumulative cases comprised of several arguments.
- *Disagreement about assessment*: There is disagreement about the character and quality of the arguments offered for and against various religious claims. Among those who disagree about such matters are many well-informed and intelligent persons.
- *Evidence we do not possess*: Even those who are very well-informed of evidence and arguments relevant to religious claims do not possess even close to *all* of the relevant evidence. Even the best-informed epistemic agents possess only a small subset of the total available evidence. For reflective epistemic agents, awareness of these facts calls into question whether the relevant evidence they possess is *representative* of the total relevant evidence available.

- *Elsewhere and elsewhen*: Many people who hold attitudes towards religious claims would have held different attitudes if they had been born at another time or somewhere else. For if these individuals had been born in other times or places, they would have been exposed to different bodies of evidence and would have been disposed to evaluate that evidence differently.

It seems plausible that many reflective religious believers (along with reflective atheists and agnostics) are aware of higher-order evidence of the kinds just listed. Arguably, awareness of such higher-order evidence renders (e.g.) theistic belief less rational than it would otherwise be. To put the point differently, it is prima facie plausible that awareness of each of the various pieces of higher-order evidence merits at least *some* doxastic attitude adjustment. And when these pieces of higher-order evidence are accumulated, their effect may be quite significant. In light of this, it can be difficult to see how someone aware of the amount and variety of such higher-order evidence could be rational in retaining belief (or disbelief) in the disputed claim. The apparent force of this higher-order evidence, coupled with the plausible claim that many religious persons are aware of it, raises the spectre of wide-ranging religious scepticism.

Assume, then, that many religious subjects are aware of the higher-order evidence discussed above (or some significant subset of it). Here are two key questions regarding the epistemic import of such evidence for such believers: (1) How much epistemic weight do the various pieces of higher-order evidence merit *on their own*? and (2) How much epistemic weight do these pieces of evidence merit when considered *collectively*? Let's take these questions in turn.

In the philosophical literature, one can find varying assessments of the separate pieces of higher-order evidence listed above (on disagreement as evidence of unreliability, see Hick 2001: 26 ff., and Kornblith 2010; on evidence we don't possess, see Ballantyne 2015; on the 'elsewhere, elsewhen' problem, see Hick 2001: 26 ff.; White 2010; Ballantyne 2013; and Bogardus 2013). Some argue that the individual elements by themselves carry significant epistemic weight. Others argue that the individual pieces of evidence carry very little (if any) epistemic weight on their own. Nevertheless, there is reason to think that each of the individual pieces of higher-order evidence mentioned above should be accorded *at least some* epistemic weight, where according such weight expresses itself in at least a modest doxastic attitude change. To see this, consider someone, S, who holds a religious belief that *p* on grounds G and who subsequently becomes aware of one of the pieces of higher-order evidence mentioned above—for example Evidence of Unreliability (EU). Even if G supports S's belief that *p* quite strongly, it is plausible that (G and EU) will support *p* to a lesser extent than G itself. For EU is evidence that many subjects like S have heeded misleading evidence or have failed to heed non-misleading evidence. To be sure, EU does not entail that S herself has a false belief for either of these reasons. But because many subjects like S *do* believe falsely, awareness of EU would seem to counsel S to be at least somewhat more circumspect in her attitude towards *p*. Compare the following: Suppose six patients walk in to the doctor's office for a normal check-up. Each feels very good, and each believes he is healthy on the basis of this feeling. After some routine tests, the group is sitting in the lobby awaiting test results. Suddenly, the doctor enters and informs the group that five of them have been infected with a dreadful disease whose mortality rate is 50 per cent. He has not yet informed the patients *which* of them is infected, nor has he identified the disease. Plausibly, each of the patients should be less confident of his health than he was the moment before the announcement. But this case seems analogous to that of the religious believer who has just learned of EU.

Here is another way to put the point. Notice that EU alerts S to the possibilities that S has misleading evidence or has assessed non-misleading evidence incorrectly. These possibilities are in effect explanations for her believing that *p*—explanations that compete with S's having rationally assessed non-misleading evidence in coming to a *true* belief that *p*. So given her awareness of EU, S must now consider three possible explanations of her belief:

- *True because non-misleading*: S believes *p* (which is true) because S has assessed non-misleading evidence rationally.
- *False because misleading*: S believes *p* (which is false) because S has rationally assessed misleading evidence for *p*.
- *False because poorly assessed*: S believes *p* (which is false) because S has made a mistake in assessing evidence relevant to *p*.

Rational belief does not *in general* require that a subject rationally take the Truth explanation to be the best explanation for her belief that *p*. But when one becomes aware of competing explanations, the latter can erode the epistemic status of an otherwise rational belief. Crucially, there need not be a great deal of positive evidence for these competing possibilities in order for these to cast doubt on the Truth explanation. Indeed, the rival (falsehood-involving) explanations might both be inferior to the Truth explanation and yet still undermine this explanation. This is just an instance of a more general epistemological point: merely by being in the field of available explanations, a hypothesis can 'steal away' rational credibility from even the best available explanation.

And arguably, the situation is similar with respect to the Truth explanation of S's belief vis-à-vis its rival explanations. Just by 'being there', so to speak, these explanations undermine the Truth explanation—and thus S's belief that *p*—at least to some degree. Because EU makes these rival explanations salient, it plays a role in undermining S's belief, at least to some extent. The other pieces of higher-order evidence listed earlier arguably play similar roles. That is, once a subject is aware of them, *difficulty in assessment, disagreement about assessment, evidence we don't possess*, and *elsewhere and elsewhen* each make salient explanations for S's belief that rival the Truth explanation. Thus, even if it is the best available explanation, the Truth explanation loses at least some of its credibility given the presence of alternatives. And this fact undermines the target belief for reflective subjects who are aware of it.

Next consider how much weight the relevant pieces of higher-order evidence merit when they are *accumulated*. At least initially, the evidential impact of this collective evidence would seem quite impressive. Consider a subject who is aware of evidence of unreliability in the relevant field, difficulty and disagreement over assessment of the relevant evidence, the relative paucity of this evidence, and the fragile contingency of her belief. Given all this, it may seem that whatever the epistemic status of her religious beliefs apart from the higher-order evidence, the latter must ensure that this status dwindles significantly.

Though the issue is too complex for a comprehensive treatment here, it's worth noting two ways in which the above line of thought can tend to overestimate the cumulative impact of higher-order evidence.

First, the cumulative effect of the various kinds of higher-order evidence will depend significantly on the extent to which they are independent of each other. To the extent that the individual pieces of evidence are independent, their cumulative force will tend to increase. On the other hand, to the extent that they are dependent on each other, their cumulative force will be mitigated. For in that case, treating the pieces of evidence as though they were independent will involve double-counting of evidence. On this point, it is worth noting that *difficulty in assessment* is linked to *disagreement about assessment*—for surely the fact that some of the relevant issues are difficult partly explains why there is disagreement about them. Similarly, it is plausible that *evidence we do not possess* and *elsewhere and elsewhen* are linked. For one thing, it seems that part of the reason the *elsewhere and elsewhen* phenomenon is epistemically worrisome is precisely because it dictates what evidence we do and do not possess. Of course, none of this implies that the various pieces of higher-order evidence we have considered *do not* have a cumulative effect—it is very plausible that they do. However, it should also be clear that estimating that cumulative effect is by no means straightforward; there is ample opportunity to overestimate by double-counting here.

Second, the extent to which the accumulated higher-order evidence disconfirms some particular belief that *p* will depend on how likely that evidence is on *p* as opposed to not-*p*; but when *p* is some substantive religious claim, how likely the higher-order evidence is on *p* as opposed to not-*p* will itself often be a controversial matter. For example, some believe that rampant disagreement about whether God exists is very improbable on the hypothesis that God exists but unsurprising on the hypothesis that God does not exist. If this is so, then the fact that there is rampant disagreement about the existence of God is strong evidence against the existence of God. However, whether it is true that *disagreement about God's existence is improbable on the hypothesis that God exists* is itself a controversial matter, especially in the light of debates over the likelihood of divine hiddenness on theism. If disagreement about God's existence is *not* more surprising on the hypothesis that God exists than on the hypothesis that God does not exist, then the existence of such disagreement is *not* evidence against God's existence. This is one point at which one's assessment of the normative significance of higher-order evidence (including that of disagreement) depends on one's assessment of other substantive issues. This in turn casts doubt on views of disagreement that divorce the assessment of the normative significance of disagreement from related substantive issues.

Moreover, notice that even if certain kinds of higher-order evidence are unlikely on certain versions of theism, they may not be unlikely on others. For example, on certain versions of Christianity, human cognitive faculties have been marred by sin, so that one might very well expect us to be prone to religious disagreement, errors in reasoning in religious matters, and so on. If this is right, then, other things being equal, some versions of theism (e.g. Christianity) may be less vulnerable to defeat via higher-order evidence than others (King 2016 develops this point). Indeed, if rampant religious disagreement is more probable on some specific version of theism than it is on alternative views, then disagreement may actually tend to confirm that view over its rivals.

## Concluding Remarks

We have explored at length the normative significance of disagreement and other varieties of higher-order evidence. It is prima facie plausible that such evidence is sometimes, even often, significant for the epistemic status of religious beliefs. However, it also seems that higher-order evidence is not *all* that's epistemically significant. Additional relevant factors include:

- the extent to which a subject's belief is rational apart from her awareness of higher-order evidence;
- the extent of evidential overlap between subjects involved in religious disagreements;
- the extent to which rationality is or is not permissive (which partly determines which varieties of rational pluralism are plausible);
- the extent to which the varieties of higher-order evidence are independent of one another; and
- the extent to which the relevant higher-order evidence is to be expected (or not) conditional on some particular religious belief and its competitors.

Weighing these factors in concrete cases can be a very complicated matter—a matter on which general epistemological theories cannot reasonably be expected to weigh in.

This result is bound to be disappointing to anyone looking to epistemologists for definitive cognitive guidance for navigating an epistemically treacherous religious landscape. The guidance this result suggests would point those weary from their exploration of religious diversity into equally rough terrain. The main thing that can be said in defence of this advice is that its alternative—seeking a shortcut that sidesteps the factors listed above—is even more dangerous. Rather than ignore such considerations, the present account urges both believers and non-believers to base their judgements about the epistemic significance of religious diversity on all of the relevant considerations (higher-order evidence, first-order arguments, experiential grounds, etc.) of which they are aware. The claim that judgements about the significance of religious disagreement should be based on all such considerations, though perhaps not as helpful as one might like, carries at least one advantage: it is true.

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# PART III

# SAMPLINGS FROM THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

## CHAPTER 20

# PAUL THE APOSTLE

### PAUL K. MOSER

The available undisputed letters of the apostle Paul offer a distinctive epistemology regarding human knowledge of God. We might call this a *pneumatic epistemology* given its central role for the Spirit of God, or a *pneumatic wisdom epistemology* given its role for a special kind of wisdom, linked to Jesus Christ, in human knowledge of God. Because the Spirit and the wisdom in question are, in Paul's thought, the Spirit and the wisdom of Jesus Christ, Paul's theological epistemology is inherently Christological. It is also inherently grace-oriented, given Paul's understanding of how God relates to humans in a manner that displaces human earning, or meriting, of divine favour. We shall see how a kind of *cognitive* grace figures in Paul's account of knowing God.

## Some New Testament Evidence

Paul is no ordinary epistemologist because he takes seriously, even in human knowing, the God of Isaiah who brings judgement on humans for the sake of their redemption. Typical epistemologists do not attend to the role of divine judgement in human knowing. Paul echoes Isaiah in his following statement about knowing God:

> It is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know (*egnō*) God through [its] wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.
>
> (1 Cor. 1:19–21, NRSV, here and in subsequent biblical translations, unless otherwise noted; cf. Isa. 29:14)

This quotation, from one of Paul's earliest undisputed letters, represents his view that 'in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through [its] wisdom'. We may plausibly take this view to imply that humans do not come to know God only through their own resources, including their own thinking, reasoning, and explaining. Human knowers are not impartial inquirers, at least relative to God's reality. Instead, they are alienated from God in their thinking and in their willing, and they can even suppress the truth on offer about God (Rom. 1:18, 3:9–19; cf. 1 Cor. 2:14). As a result, they are not well positioned to know God on their own, contrary to a common human attitude, especially among philosophers.

The question arises regarding how humans are able to know God, if not on their own. Paul's answer is straightforward: 'No one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may [know (*eidōmen*) the things] bestowed on us by God' (1 Cor. 2:11–12; cf. 1 Cor. 2:14). Knowing God comes courtesy of God's self-revealing Spirit, and not from self-sufficient human resources. This is one of Paul's distinctive epistemic insights, and it goes against the grain of much traditional epistemology. Human knowledge of God is one of the things 'bestowed on us by God', so long as we are suitably cooperative towards God. We can distinguish knowing *that God exists* and knowing *God*, the latter personal knowledge having directness relative to God that is unnecessary for the former factual knowledge. Personal knowledge arises from the kind of person-to-person knowing where personal acquaintance occurs. We may grant that knowing God entails knowing that God exists, but it does not follow that God values only factual knowledge (e.g. knowledge that God exists). The latter is not necessarily redemptive, or salvific, for humans, because one can have it while hating God and deliberately opposing God and redemption by God (e.g. in the Gospels, the demons manifest knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God).

Paul's epistemology largely concerns knowledge of God that is redemptively valuable for human salvation by God. Such knowledge brings one into a filial relation of (deepening) reconciliation to God, whereby one becomes volitionally cooperative with God. Paul expresses such knowing in terms of 'being known by God', and he links it directly to 'loving God' (1 Cor. 8:3; cf. Gal. 4:9). He contrasts such knowing with the ordinary kind of factual knowing, of which it is true to say: 'Knowledge (*gnōsis*) puffs up, but love (*agapē*) builds up' (1 Cor. 8:1). In other words, knowing God aright does not promote or condone the harmful pride that sometimes accompanies human factual knowing.

Paul expresses a strategic concern of his ministry to the Corinthian Christians, as follows: 'My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power (*dunamis*), so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God' (1 Cor. 2:4–5). Paul's idea of human faith in God 'resting on the power of God' is cognitive, or evidential, and not just psychological, because the latter power is a 'truth indicator' of what is believed. It concerns the kind of evidence or truth indicator that supports the content of such faith, and this evidence has its source in God's power. The latter source is, of course, no mere claim, belief, or argument; it includes features of God's moral character, such as divine holy love.

Paul christologically identifies redemptive knowing as being directed toward 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'. He writes: 'it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. 4:6). Paul has in mind a creation–re-creation analogy whereby God the Creator re-creates cooperative persons by shining a life-giving light into their hearts. This lesson fits with Paul's following statement about knowing Christ: 'Even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!' (2 Cor. 5:16–17). One's knowing Christ from a divine point of view includes one's becoming a 'new creation'. We might say, then, that Paul does epistemology from a divine, re-creation point of view rather than a human point of view. This divine point of view gives a central evidential role to the unique divine power exemplified in Jesus Christ. It does not rest with mundane evidence that omits the supernatural power manifested by God in Christ. Instead, it gives a central role to the kind of supernatural evidence in divine self-manifestation in Christ.

Paul elaborates on the relevant kind of 'knowing Christ' to the Philippian Christians, as follows:

> I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.
>
> (Phil. 3:8–10)

Paul is not thinking of mere knowledge that Christ exists; he is concerned instead with knowing Christ *as Lord*, even as *his* Lord, where such knowing bears authoritatively on the direction and mode of (everything in) one's life. The latter knowing includes knowledge of 'the power' of Christ's resurrection. In typical fashion, however, he refuses to ignore the death of Christ that preceded his resurrection by God. For the sake of knowing Christ, Paul desires 'the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death'. This is knowing Christ via *kenōsis*, the kind of emptying of one's own desires in order to obey God's will, after the example of Christ himself (Phil. 2:6–8; cf. Mk. 14:36). Filial knowledge of God is kenotic in just this cruciform, Christ-shaped manner (Gorman 2009).

## *Agapē* in Knowing God

What is the 'light' of re-creation that God shines into the hearts of cooperative people to give them knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ and thereby to make them a new creation? Or, to put the question in different terms from Paul: what is the 'power of Christ's resurrection' that Paul is willingly dying (literally) to know? Paul offers his most straightforward answer as follows: 'hope [in God] does not disappoint us, because

God's love (*agapē*) has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (Rom. 5:5; cf. 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5; Rom. 8:23). Paul would say the same of faith in God and of knowing God: God has done something within people cooperative toward God to ground, with distinctive evidence, their hope and faith in God and their knowing God. This divine intervention in human experience includes God's pouring divine *agapē* into human hearts through the Spirit of God given to cooperative people. As a result, the humans in question are not disappointed evidentially or psychologically in their hoping and trusting in God. We may plausibly regard the 'light' of re-creation and 'the power of resurrection' as coming from God's Spirit who imparts divine *agapē* to human hearts.

God's *agapē* poured into human hearts is God's *compassionate will* to bring about what is morally and spiritually best for cooperative humans. Humans can refuse to cooperate with God and thereby block the power of this *agapē* for themselves, because God does not coerce human wills regarding divine redemption (Rom. 10:21). When humans cooperatively receive divine *agapē*, in Paul's epistemology, they are transformed toward the moral and spiritual character of God in Christ (Rom. 12:1–2; cf. Eph. 4:21–3). Participating in divine *agapē* can also lead to deepening knowledge of Christ, as Paul indicates with regard to the Laodicean Christians: 'I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love (*agapē*), so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge (*epignōsis*) of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom (*sophia*) and knowledge (*gnōsis*)' (Col. 2:2–3). He then adds that 'I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments (*pithanologia*)' (Col. 2:4), thus suggesting that *agapē*-based knowledge of Christ is more basic and secure than plausible arguments or claims. This is an important indicator of Paul's view of the foundational role of experienced divine *agapē* in knowing Christ and God.

The *agapē*-based knowledge of Christ in question requires one's cooperatively responding to the intervention of God's *agapē*-bearing Spirit. Such responding can result in one's finding God's will within oneself, however imperfectly. This will includes God's will to love others, even enemies of oneself and God (Rom. 12:14–21; cf. Mt. 5:43–48). One can be surprised by the new reality of divine *agapē* within oneself, as it marks a noticeable change from one's previous inclinations toward others, particularly toward one's enemies. This reality underwrites Paul's aforementioned talk of 'new creation' in the event of one's coming to know Christ from a divine, agapeic point of view. The latter knowledge is irreducible to (factual) knowledge that something is the case.

In keeping with his pneumatic epistemology, Paul writes to the Roman Christians: 'You have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God' (Rom. 8:15–16; cf. 2 Cor. 1:21–2). Paul's mention of adoption and of God's fatherhood suggests that he has a kind of filial knowledge in mind whereby one comes to know God as one's authoritative Father. Accordingly, the Spirit's witness to cooperative people indicates their being children of God. Indeed, God's Spirit prompts cooperative people to 'cry "Abba! Father!"' Paul's use of 'Abba' (in a Greek letter) recalls the Aramaic reference by Jesus to God as Father, and Jesus serves as the perfect model for the desired filial relationship to God. As a result, the witness of God's Spirit calls for *kenōsis* from God's children, in keeping with the self-sacrificial obedience to God manifested by Jesus in Gethsemane and in his crucifixion (Phil. 2:5–8). Paul's pneumatic epistemology, then, comes with a robust moral and spiritual challenge to be conformed to the self-sacrificial character of Jesus. The *agapē* that underwrites filial knowledge of God in Christ images and emerges from the self-sacrificial character of Jesus.

In Romans 8:15–16, we see the widely overlooked role of simple filial prayer in receiving divine assurance, including evidence of God, directly from God. Accordingly, even young children can enter God's kingdom with *well-grounded* conviction, owing to the gift of God's intervening Spirit. Likewise, philosophers and others who respond cooperatively to God rely on such a gift. In addition, they cannot supply evidence on their own that will silence sceptics regarding God. God's Spirit, in Paul's account, provides the ultimate evidence of God's reality and moral character, and does so with an inward challenge to the human will to yield to God's perfect will. This evidence must be received from a first-person perspective on the evidence, and therefore it does not operate just by proxy.

As self-authenticating, God supplies the needed evidence via self-manifestation, and God does this at the opportune time for cooperative people. In this vein, Paul attributes the following statement to God: 'I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me' (Rom. 10:20). Accordingly, God's distinctive self-manifestation with *agapē* toward humans has a central place in Paul's epistemology. This manifestation need not be discursive, or propositional, but can be nondiscursively experiential—akin, for instance, to one's being presented *de re* with an experienced quality of human caring toward oneself. Paul here follows an Old Testament tradition of God's self-authentication via self-manifestation to humans (Isa. 45:22–3; Gen. 22:16–17; cf. Heb. 6:13–14). In modern language, Paul is an evidentialist and an experiential foundationalist about human knowledge of God, because such knowledge requires evidence and is based ultimately on experiential foundations of divine intervention (that are not beliefs). These foundations include God's self-manifesting God's character to humans, through, for example, divine holy love. As self-authenticating for humans, God is no mere idea or theory for Paul. Instead, God is a powerful intentional agent who can and does produce evidence for cooperative humans by intervening in their experiences and lives.

The key role for a personal divine Spirit in Paul's epistemology cannot be reduced to any role for a psychological faculty or process. Paul's epistemology is therefore foreign to secular epistemology and even to much philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, given that the latter neglect the cognitive role of God's Spirit. In addition to being pneumatic, it is an *incarnational* epistemology, because it assigns a central cognitive role to God's Spirit *dwelling* in humans, in such a way that they become a temple of God's Spirit. Accordingly, Paul asks the Corinthian Christians: 'do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?' (1 Cor. 6:19). God's Spirit, then, works within people cooperative towards God, thus providing an indwelling, incarnational witness to God's reality and character (see Ch. 7 on the 'Inner Witness of the Spirit').

In Paul's incarnational epistemology, humans themselves can become personifying evidence of God's reality, owing to their receiving and manifesting the divine features of the inward Spirit of God. Such evidence stems from cooperative human acquaintance with God that enables humans to become agents who receive and reflect God's presence and moral character for others. The characteristic evidence of God's reality and moral character becomes increasingly available and salient to a person as that person becomes increasingly willing to be personifying evidence of God's reality. It is part of the good news from God that followers of Jesus are privileged to reflect the glory (and thus the reality) of God as perfectly imaged in Jesus. Paul remarks: 'all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit' (2 Cor. 3:18). The idea of the 'image of God' discernible in humans cooperative towards God thus plays an important role in Paul's epistemology.

As suggested, Paul's epistemology is grace based, in that first-hand knowledge of God is a *direct gift* of God's Spirit that cannot be separated from the gift-giver. We may call this 'cognitive grace', because it includes a powerful cognitive gift and a personal evidential ground that displace any requirement for intellectual earning or meriting from God. Paul acknowledges an offer of a freely given presence of God's transforming Spirit, who seeks cooperative fellowship with humans. Humans, however, must appropriate this cognitive gift and its evidential ground in personal struggles, given the human condition of selfishness and pride. We might think of these as Gethsemane struggles, after the model of Jesus in Gethsemane, because the human will undergoes challenges from God's Spirit to conform to God's perfect will. The cognitive grace in question, however, does not depend on philosophical sophistication. It is a gift extended to all cooperative people. Although this gift can be an object of careful philosophical assessment, its reality and value do not rely on such assessment.

In offering fellowship and new life with God, the gift under consideration is *directly* challenging toward selfish and prideful human ways that resist God. This gift includes God as the (objective) cognitive ground of foundational belief that God is real and good. The divine aim of cognitive grace is twofold: that human faith in God have its ultimate cognitive ground not in human wisdom but rather in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:4–5), and that this ground provide what humans vitally need: fellowship and new life in God's presence. Cognitive grace, then, aims to be redemptive for humans, not merely cognitive.

## RIGHTEOUSNESS AND COGNITIVE GRACE

We can benefit from a neglected parallel between Paul's view of knowing God and his understanding of righteousness, or justification (*dikaiosunē*), as a redemptive gift. Paul's theological epistemology owes its main features to the divine redemption of humans by grace that works 'through righteousness' (Rom. 5:21). The redemption of humans entails their being *reconciled* to God, via a self-manifestation of God's character in Jesus Christ.

Paul remarks: 'in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us' (2 Cor. 5:19). Jesus is God's representative victim (of human opposition) who offers divine forgiveness and fellowship, instead of condemnation, to wayward humans. We may call this the *divine manifest-offering* approach to redemption, in line with Romans 3:21–6 (which mentions divine 'manifestation' repeatedly). God's moral character of righteous and forgiving love is made *manifest* in Jesus Christ, and life-giving fellowship with God is *offered* in Jesus Christ as a gift, in keeping with God's gracious character.

The divine redemptive gift for humans is anchored in (a) the forgiveness offered and manifested via God's self-giving sacrifice in Jesus Christ, and (b) God's resurrection approval of Jesus as Lord and as the giver of God's Spirit. The manifestation of God's character in Jesus reveals a God who offers forgiveness and lasting fellowship to humans for their redemption as reconciled life with God. The death of Jesus by itself cannot bring about divine–human reconciliation, but it does aim to provide God's means of implementing redemption via divine manifestation and offering. Actual divine–human reconciliation requires that humans *receive*, or *appropriate*, the manifest offering of forgiveness and fellowship by means of grounded trust, or faith, in God. This kind of human cooperation with God figures centrally in the divine redemptive plan outlined by Paul.

Jesus Christ came from God to identify with humans in their weakness and despair, in order to offer them reconciled life with God (1 Thess. 5:9–10). Jesus also represented God in righteous and merciful *agapē*, again for the sake of reconciling humans to God (Rom. 5:6–8). As God's intended mediator, Jesus aims to represent, and to offer a personal bridge between, God *and* humans. He seeks to reconcile humans to God with the gift of fellowship anchored in merciful *agapē* as the power of God's Spirit. This good news is inherently theological and Christological and hence cannot be reduced to principles of morality.

Jesus Christ's death on the cross, commanded of him by God, aims to manifest how far he and God will go to offer redemption to humans (Rom. 3:25, 1 Cor. 5:7, Phil. 2:8; cf. Mk. 14:23–4). In keeping with God's plan, Jesus gives humans his life, out of God's self-sacrificial *agapē*, to manifest that God mercifully and righteously loves humans to the fullest extent. Jesus thereby offers humans redemption as the gift of unearned forgiveness, fellowship, and membership in God's family via reception of God's Spirit (Rom. 5:8, 8:38–9). This is the heart of the good news of divine redemption for humans that Paul announces on the basis of evidence from God's Spirit.

The cross of Jesus Christ, in Paul's message, is the definitive place where God mercifully judges and forgives human rebellion against God. Accordingly, Paul reports to the Corinthian Christians: 'When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified' (1 Cor. 2:1–2; cf. 1 Cor. 1:23, Gal. 6:14). We should not infer that God punished Jesus on the cross, a reportedly innocent man before God. No New Testament writer teaches otherwise, and Paul himself refuses to draw that inference (Gal. 3:13, citing a version of Deut. 21:23). According to

Paul, God sent Jesus into the world to undergo suffering and death from oppositional humans, and God mercifully deems this scenario adequate for dealing justly with human rebellion against God. In this respect, Jesus enables God to be 'just and the justifier' in the divine reconciliation of humans (Rom. 3:26). In manifesting and offering divine forgiveness and fellowship, Jesus offers an alternative to selfish fear, condemnation, shame, and guilt among humans toward God (Rom. 8:1).

The central motive for the crucifixion of Jesus is (the manifestation of) God's *righteous agapē* for humans. Paul links God's righteousness, or justification, with God's *agapē*, as follows:

> God manifests his own *agapē* for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.... Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath [of God].... [W]hile we were enemies [of God], we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son.
>
> (Rom. 5:8–10, my trans.)

God thus takes the initiative and the means through Jesus Christ in offering a gift of divine–human reconciliation to secure human redemption. As noted, the self-sacrificial death of Jesus manifests forgiving *agapē* and righteousness from God, and divine *agapē* is morally significant in being *righteous*. Paul has this kind of robust *agapē* in mind when he makes his significant claim in Romans 5:5 about the evidential basis of hope and faith in God.

Mere forgiveness of humans by God would not adequately counter the wrongdoing that calls for forgiveness. Human neglect of the divine authority needed for a lasting good life is central to the wrongdoing that produces alienation from God (Rom. 1:21, 28). In identifying and judging the basis of human wrongdoing, God upholds divine moral integrity in the redemption of humans, and does not condone evil. Through the self-sacrifice of Jesus, *God* meets the standard of perfect *agapē* for humans, when they could not and would not. God then offers this gift of righteousness in Jesus to humans, as God's Passover lamb for them (1 Cor. 5:7). On this basis, Paul announces to the Corinthian Christians: 'you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body' (1 Cor. 6:20; cf. 1 Cor. 7:23). The redemptive gift in question is to be received by trust, or faith, in God and Jesus, which includes an attitude of obedience towards them. Otherwise, the human prospect for meeting the standard of divine *agapē*, and for redemption by God's perfect standard, would be bleak at best.

In explaining and proclaiming the divine redemption of humans, Paul offers a crucial distinction between (a) *gift*-righteousness from God for cooperative humans and (b) humanly *earned*, or *merited*, righteousness by means of, for instance, the Mosaic law (Phil. 3:9, Rom. 3:21–6, 9:30–2, 10:3–4, Gal. 3:11–12). Owing to their failure by the divine standard of perfect *agapē*, humans are not in a position to *earn*, or *merit*, a right relationship with God (Rom. 3:10–20). So, if this right relationship is to become actual, it must come from something other than human earning. The needed alternative is the divine *gift* of redemption by grace (*charis*) offered to undeserving humans.

Wayward humans need to struggle to *appropriate* the divine gift through the (sometimes severe) rigours of trust, or faith, and obedience towards God. This struggle, however, does not include the human earning or meriting of God's approval. Human acts of obedience to God, then, are not automatically identical with 'works' of earning or merit before God, despite widespread confusions in this area. Paul connects 'works' in the relevant sense with an earning, or a paying a debt, towards God, as follows: 'to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due' (Rom 4:4). Though 'works' are incompatible with a divine gift and hence with divine redemptive grace, they should not be confused with acts of obedience to God (see Moser 2013: Ch. 4). Even many in national Israel mistakenly pursued God's righteousness by works rather than as a gift (Rom. 9:30–2, 10:1–4).

## Filial Knowledge and Spiritual Wisdom

Paul contrasts 'human' wisdom with 'God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory' (1 Cor. 2:7). The main difference between the two is that God's wisdom has the divine power (*dunamis*), including the power of self-giving *agapē,* to give a lasting good life with God to cooperative humans, whereas human wisdom does not. Only God's wisdom can empower human redemption as a lasting good life with God and others. Such wisdom includes the kind of filial knowledge of God that is central to Paul's theological epistemology.

Paul emphasizes the role of human weakness, or impotence, in relation to God's power, as follows: 'We have this treasure [of redemption from God] in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us' (2 Cor. 4:7; see Savage 1996). The power and wisdom needed by humans for a lasting good life must come from God, because God alone has such power and wisdom. Paul describes the relevant power and wisdom:

> We have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong [= empowered] with all the strength [= power, *dunamis*] that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father.
>
> (Col. 1:9–12)

Paul prays for the Colossian Christians that they have 'knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom'. Such knowledge goes beyond mere knowledge that God exists, and it figures in what we have called 'filial knowledge of God'. Similarly, the relevant 'spiritual wisdom' is not mere knowledge that a claim is true. Instead, it is directed toward 'lead[ing] lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him', thus involving a mode of *living*, and not just a mode of thinking, believing, or factual knowing. It welcomes God's power for the sake of joyfully enduring the difficulty of life with patience. This is the power to endure life while honouring and thanking God, come what may, even in the face of temptation to give up in life's hardships.

We now have an important contrast between filial knowledge and 'spiritual wisdom' regarding God on the one hand, and mere factual knowledge and any kind of 'human wisdom' on the other hand. Exceeding mere factual knowledge, filial knowledge and spiritual wisdom regarding God welcome God's power, including the power of *agapē*, for the sake of living a lasting good life, pleasing to God (or, 'worthy of the Lord'). Mere factual knowledge that I cannot save myself by God's standard of perfect *agapē* does not amount to filial knowledge of God. Such factual knowledge can be accompanied by a defective volitional attitude toward God. I still could hate God and hate that I cannot save myself by God's standard, perhaps because I desire full autonomy and the option where I could redeem myself (and perhaps even create myself), without any divine help. Arguably, many people actually desire self-sufficiency or full autonomy, apart from God.

The reality that I cannot save myself by God's perfect standard is not hateworthy, but is actually good. By this standard, in hating my inadequacy, I hate something good for my redemption, and this opposes the kind of filial knowledge and spiritual wisdom under consideration. Even a grudging or indifferent reception of something redemptively good would be a deficiency in filial knowledge and spiritual wisdom. Accordingly, filial knowledge and spiritual wisdom, unlike mere factual knowledge, must be volitionally attuned to what is redemptively good by welcoming it when the opportunity arises. Such an involvement of the will indicates that we are not dealing with something merely intellectual. Filial knowledge and spiritual wisdom, then, are sensitive to human volition, and if human volition is distorted, human reception of such knowledge and wisdom can be difficult. The volitional attitudes of a potential human recipient can, in fact, resist filial knowledge and spiritual wisdom regarding God (Rom. 1:18, 21, 25).

Paul anchors filial knowledge and spiritual wisdom regarding God not in an abstract principle or a Platonic form, but in a personal agent who manifests God's power without defect. He refers to 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1:24) and to 'Christ Jesus who became for us wisdom from God … and redemption' (1 Cor. 1:30). Paul identifies some of the features of Jesus Christ that constitute his being the power and the wisdom of God: 'Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross' (Phil. 2:5–8).

A key feature is the willing conformity of Jesus to God's will, even when the result is self-sacrificial death. The idea of Jesus's *humble obedience* to God captures this feature and differs from *grudging* obedience and even *mere* obedience. It ultimately welcomes God's perfect will, even if one is initially ambivalent and faces difficult consequences.

This is the same obedience Jesus exemplifies in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:36). In his conformity to God's will, Jesus exemplifies the power and wisdom of God as an agent, humbly and reverently cooperating with God on the basis of God's distinctive wisdom and power, including the power of self-sacrificial *agapē*. The attitude of Gethsemane and Calvary, then, becomes the attitude for properly receiving the gift of filial knowledge and spiritual wisdom from God.

## Incarnational Epistemology without Natural Theology

Some read Romans 1 to suggest that Paul advances traditional natural theology. Paul's theological epistemology, however, contrasts with traditional natural theology as a proposed avenue to knowledge of God. Unlike Paul's incarnational epistemology, the arguments of traditional natural theology obscure the serious human need for (a) the cognitive grace of God's personal Spirit taking the initiative to intervene in a human's experience, and (b) human turning, in volitional repentance, to cooperate with that intervention, in fellowship and new life with God. This obscuring arises from the focus of traditional natural theology on merely *de dicto* (propositional) arguments rather than on an experienced divine intervention *de re* in a human life. When we shift the focus from such arguments to the personal intervention of God's Spirit, we consider a distinctive kind of personal, incarnational evidence for God's reality. We then attend to a distinctive kind of intervening volitional pressure in human experience that indicates the reality and presence of God's Spirit.

Traditional natural theology suffers from undue attention to what we may call *spectator evidence*. Such evidence is volitionally neutral in that it that does not offer a powerful volitional challenge to inquirers, on the basis of presented *agapē*, to cooperate with God and thereby to become personifying evidence of God's reality. Accordingly, traditional natural theology neglects authoritative evidence of God's reality that invites a human to cooperate with God's will and thereby to incarnate God's *agapē* on offer. Given the prospect of such authoritative evidence from God, one's resolute commitment to remain volitionally neutral toward God's existence and will can hinder one from appropriating available evidence of God's existence.

Paul does not offer any kind of divine guarantee from the arguments of traditional natural theology. Instead, he remarks as follows: 'God … has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee' (*arrabōn*; 2 Cor. 1:21–2, RSV). Paul refers to the 'God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee' (*arrabōn*; 2 Cor. 5:5, RSV; cf. Eph. 1:13–14). The relevant notion of 'guarantee' has an evidential component, signifying that God's Spirit indicates to us the reality and faithfulness of God. God's Spirit, in Paul's epistemology, does what no argument can.

One might *imagine* Paul saying, for instance in Romans 1, that our guarantee of God's reality arises from some argument of natural theology involving: (a) the first cause or the ground of all contingent events; (b) the designer of order in the universe; (c) the fine-tuner of the physical universe; (d) the ground of agency, consciousness, or morality; or (e) the simplest explanatory postulate for a specified range of data. Paul did not say this, however, because he embraces the important lesson that the true God is self-authenticating via the self-manifestation of God's perfect moral character of *agapē*. We have noted that this self-authentication, including the accompanying self-manifestation, comes from God's intervening Spirit, by whom God pours his transforming *agapē* into the hearts of cooperative recipients. So, Paul has no need for the arguments of traditional natural theology. They are, in addition, dubious and impotent in ways that the intervening Spirit of God is not, and they do not fit with Paul's incarnational epistemology.

Many people have misunderstood Paul's remarks about God and creation in Romans 1. Nowhere does Paul say or imply that the created world *by itself* is evidence for a personal God worthy of worship. He definitely does not claim this in Romans 1. Paul claims that '*God* showed them' about God's reality via creation (emphasis added), but not via creation *alone*. His key remark is: 'what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them' (Rom. 1:19). We do not find a natural theological argument here or elsewhere in Paul. Paul is not giving an *argument* from design in Romans 1; he is simply reporting that God can self-manifest *through* nature. It would be quite a different, implausible view to suggest that nature in itself reveals the personal God worthy of worship.

God must show people God's reality, if they are to know God, because creation does not do this by itself, even if God sometimes uses it as a medium for divine self-manifestation. In that case, natural theological arguments from creation alone will not deliver a personal God worthy of worship. An analogy can illustrate the point at hand: when I phone you on my mobile phone, my phone by itself fails to give you evidence of me, as a personal agent; I can, however, use my phone (as a medium) to give you such evidence. Chapter 1 of Romans invites this distinction, in connection with Romans 1:19, even though most interpreters and philosophers of religion miss it.

The First Cause or the Designer of natural theology could be evil or nonpersonal, but Paul's God is not a genuine candidate for being evil or nonpersonal. So, Paul offers no inference from the potentially lesser god of natural theology to the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Careful reflection favours Paul here: it is highly doubtful that one can get to a personal God worthy of worship from the merely natural premises of the traditional empirical arguments of natural theology. The problem is that one cannot thereby get to God's *perfect personal moral character* and hence cannot get to the God worthy of worship, even *if* one can get to a lesser being, such as a mere source of a perceived effect or a design (Moser 2010: Ch. 3). We have to learn that God is the Creator by God's *de re* testimony, after we learn of God's moral character in our Gethsemane struggle with the intervening Spirit of God (Moser 2013: Chs 2 and 3). We can plausibly develop Paul's theological epistemology in this manner.

## CONCLUSION

Paul's theological epistemology is distinctive, profound, and resilient, despite its being widely neglected among philosophers and theologians. It conforms to Paul's Christology and pneumatology, but it finds an evidential base for knowing God in human experience rather than in abstract theology. The relevant experience is loaded with divine power, owing to the intervention of God's redemptive Spirit, but it does not depend on human theological sophistication. It therefore fits with the scope of Paul's gospel in not being limited to intellectuals. It is available to everyone who is cooperative toward God's intervening Spirit.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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### CHAPTER 21

# ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA

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## Précis

This chapter has five objectives: (1) to describe the horizons of Origen's epistemology of theology; (2) to analyse the mind and language problems his epistemology of theology addresses; (3) to interpret his epistemology of theology within the framework of his aesthetics of contemplative prayer; (4) to show how the limits of mind and language result in a 'negative' theology; and (5) to map Origen's epistemology of theology alongside issues in contemporary epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language.

## Horizons

This inquiry has an odd ring to it. Not only are the words *episteme* and *logos* ancient, but taken apart, the realities designated by these words are as well—whether rendered as thought, knowledge, science, understanding, and contemplation, or as language, speech, and explanation. Both words precede the idea of *episteme* and *logos* conjunctively—or epistemology après Descartes (Gadamer 1981: 151–5). In this context of '*dia tes ton Theion epistemes*'—'through God there is knowledge' (Clement, *Stromateis*, VII.7.44)—the question posed by Clement to Origen would be: is there such a thing as an *episteme* and a *logos* in any form other than epistemology [or a theory of knowledge] as proposed by Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant? Is it possible to approach *episteme* and *logos* other than as a theory of knowledge alone (see Berchman 2007: 175–90)?

Origen's epistemology is primarily *of* theology and *of* first philosophy, and secondarily a theory of knowledge. It is based on Plato's *Meno* and *Theaetetus* and portions of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *De Anima* (Berchman 1984: 167–200; 2003: 437–50). His epistemology of theology is threefold, encompassing mind, language, and metaphysics. He is a metaphysical 'realist' who as early as the *Peri Archon* claims there is an *episteme* that contemplates first principles (Berchman 2003: 437–50). He is an epistemological 'foundationalist' who construes the justification of knowledge non-inferentially on the basis of causal conditions. He also proposes a limited *episteme* in that there are limits to propositional thought and discursive language (for an analysis of this problem, see Sorabji 1983: 137–52). Moreover, even when Being-Intellect (or the One) is displayed or shown non-propositionally and non-discursively, it retains a causal intelligibility to human consciousness. This intelligibility is an intentionality disclosed in contemplative prayer (for parallels with Plotinus, see Alfino 1988: 273–84; D'Ancona Costa 1992: 69–113; Brisson 2013: 443–57).

Origen's epistemology of theology has its metaphysical origins and inspiration in the *anupotheton* (ungrounded) of the *idea tou agathou* (Form of the Good) of Plato's *Republic* and the hypostases of *Parmenides* (Regen 1988), and in the greater parts of Aristotle's *prote philosophia* (first philosophy) contained in the first two chapters of Book Gamma of the *Metaphysics* (Nyvlt 2012: 187–232). Origen inherits a middle Platonic reception of Plato and an interpretation of Aristotle via a commentary tradition mediated by Pseudo Aristotle's *De Mundo* and Alexander of Aphrodisias's *De Intellectu* and *De Anima* (Boehm 2003: 451–63; Berchman 1992: 241–2).

Aristotle claims God is the very paradigm of intelligibility as *Nous* (Intellect), and that there are two ways of thinking and speaking—an ordinary or natural way and an ideal or philosophical way (*Met.* $981^b29$; $1003^a21$–9). There is an *episteme* (way of thinking) that contemplates (*theorei*) 'being as being' (*on e on*), complemented by a *phusis* (nature) to which these principles and causes belong necessarily and per se (*Met.* $1003^a21$, 28–9). If, as Aristotle proposes, the activity of *episteme* (thinking) is a *theorein* (theorizing) that contemplates ultimate causes and first principles, then *nous* must join *episteme* (thought) in *theoria* (contemplation), for it is *nous* that apprehends the causal structure of reality that *episteme* contemplates. This also means that the *episteme* (thought) that contemplates the *phusis* of 'being as being' has the character of *noesis* (intellection). Its subject matter is a *noeton* described as an a-synthetic whole (*asuntheta*), which manifests or constitutes itself in *noesis* (thinking) as the unity of its *noeseos* (on thinking). Since Aristotle views ordinary thought and speech as limited (*Met.* $1017^a23$) an *episteme of* or about first principles is primarily established through ideal thought and language—or by a *legein kata tinos* (a thinking about something) through *katagorein* (categories) *De Interpretatione*, $16^b26$ and $17^a24$). Through joining (*sunthesis*) and separating (*diahairesis*) words, categorical predications are referred to a subject (*De Interpretatione*, $17^a24$). The predicates of speech make the kinds of being manifest to *episteme* (thought) but its *logos* (articulation) is limited by the nature of (categorical) thinking and speaking itself (on the *schemata* of the categories, see *Me.* $1017^a23$).

In the shadow of Aristotle's mapping of *episteme*, Origen's epistemology of theology is anchored in the metaphysical claim of causally deriving the *panta* (all) of being from a monistic *arche* (principle). Adumbrated in the *anupotheton* (ungrounded) of the *idea tou agathou* (Form of the Good) is Plato's response to the Parmenidean One; the Form of the Good functions as both intelligibility and ontological ground. It gives rise to and sustains all beings and life. As ground of all being, however, a paradox emerges which

Origen must confront: this first principle is also 'beyond being' (*epekeina tes ousias*) (*Republic* 509*ab*)—and thus beyond determinability, a claim that endangers its very intelligibility. Since Origen addresses this *aporia* (problem) within the context of his epistemology of theology, a few remarks are in order to provide context.

## PROBLEMS

If the first principle of thinking is beyond intelligibility, thinking loses all content and becomes a vacuous, perhaps even a paradoxical, thinking about nothing. Significantly, in transcending being, the Good's causal role with regard to being also becomes 'problematic'. If the object of thinking is beyond being, it loses content and becomes empty, perhaps even contradictory, as being beyond being. Aristotle addresses these concerns by introducing a paradigm of intelligibility itself (i.e. a divine *Nous*) as the highest principle. He also attributes divine *Nous* (Intellect) with formal causality as 'thinking on thinking' (*noesis noeseos*)—where the object of thinking is the pure act of thinking itself. The object of divine thinking is the *concept* of self-contemplation, while divine *noesis* is the *act* of self-contemplation itself (*Met.* XII.9). Since act and object would be different for *Nous* in *form* but the same in *content*, any tautological identity, or thinking about nothing, is avoided.

Origen offers an epistemology of theology largely framed within the context of these metaphysical problems. First, he offers an ideal knowledge (*episteme*) that contemplates being as being. There is for Origen an episteme that contemplates being categorically (Origen, *PeriArch*. II.1.2 = *Philoc*. 21 = fr. 26 Koetschau 1913). Second, he proposes an ideal language (*logos*) that articulates first principles (Pepin 1982: 91–116). Third, he articulates a God and *Logos* whose divine contemplation telescopes the *concept* and *act* of self-contemplation into a *pros hen* unity (Berchman 1992: 235–44). These claims allow Origen to avoid the paradox of the unintelligibility of thought, language, and meaning about first principles—a problem that Plotinus also escapes. Origen sets out nicely this whole schema in *Commentary on John* I.20–3, where he maps a language of metaphysics appropriate to God and *Logos*.

## GOD WITHIN

A. C. Lloyd distinguishes between two notions of self-knowledge: *conscientia* (consciousness) and *gnothi seauton* (god within), which help clarify Origen's notions of 'interiority' (Lloyd 1964: 188–200). Self-knowledge in the Platonic tradition is anchored in a *gnothi seauton* which consummates in a *homoiosis theo* (union with God: Plato, *Theaet*, 176*ab*). Origen associates the former with the 'interior self' and the latter with its 'union' in a triune God. Once negating its exterior self, the soul finds a higher, interior or 'gnostic', self, which as a knower of all possible objects of spiritual awareness achieves *homoiosis theo*. Here Origen offers a concept of self-consciousness, the subject, subjective states, and self-knowledge as a kind of 'inner sense' tied to the concept of *logos* as actualized self-consciousness which occurs when the self has *gnothi seauton*, experiencing *homoiosis theo* (for Neoplatonic parallels to Origen's appropriation of *gnothi seauton* and *homoiosis theo*, see Schroeder: 1986: 337–59).

Origen proposes that achieving *gnothi seauton* and *homoiosis theo* occurs optimally in 'chewing the cud of scripture' or through exegesis and contemplative prayer. Ultimately, such an identity is grounded upon the causal relations between the individual embodied soul and the *Second Hypostasis* or *Logos* (Intellect). The veracity of the self, subjectivity, subjective states, and self-knowledge rest ultimately on being self-conscious of the *causal* relationship between self or subject and first principles. If the activity of *Logos* is that of formal as well as final cause, then *Logos* knows not only itself, but the world and other minds as well. Moreover, since the human intellect is created by God, it follows that the human intellect is illuminated by God's *Logos*. Thus, if *Logos* is divine activity, and *logos* is divine reason immanent in human souls, then *Logos* is the activity or power that makes human reason (*logos*), in itself a potentiality, an actuality. *Logos* becomes its objects by knowing them. That is to say, *Logos* makes the human mind (*logos*) actually know (*noein*) and the knowable (*noeton*) actually be known as *episteme* (Origen, *PeriArch.*, I.3.5). Human thought and speech, and their divine objects, are—as far as possible, grasped as a *pros hen* unity (Berchman 1992: 231–52).

## WITHIN LIMITS

Origen utilizes a later Platonic–Aristotelian commonplace: the limits of thought and language and a distinction between ordinary and ideal language. Since the highest truths cannot be expressed through ordinary thought and language, only ideal thought and language 'displays' *Logos* through *logos*. Acquisition of *gnothi seauton* causally triggers: (1) an abandonment of an empirical self, framed by causal possibility, confined within sense and sensibility, and limited to ordinary language; and (2) the acquisition of a transcendent self, open to logical possibility, an unconfined intellect and intelligibility, and access to an ideal language that can attain a union with the divine. Here *episteme* discloses a God and *Logos* that cannot be 'said' or spoken of in ordinary language but only 'shown' through ideal thought and language. Here Origen prefigures Wittgenstein's distinction between the 'sayable' and 'shown' (Wittgenstein 1998: 2.021; 2.0211; 6.53–7), in his divide between ordinary thought and language (propositional and discursive) and ideal thought and language (non-propositional and non-discursive), or the languages of the ordinary/sensible and ideal/intelligible worlds, which correspond in Origen with a literal and allegorical exegesis of scripture and petitionary and contemplative prayer.

Origen also explores another later Platonic–Aristotelian trope: the intentionality of thought and language. Thought and language are *directed* or *about* something and have *meaning* (Berchman 2010: 211–24; 2015). His epistemology of theology accordingly rests on four claims:

1. (1) formal causality is the condition for the possibility of contemplative thought about the divine;
2. (2) when intentionally contemplating divinity, mental states are actively reflective and not merely passive and representational;
3. (3) *Logos* is a third thing as (*nous poietikos*) or 'active intellect' which as God's wisdom intentionally receives and directs human thought and speech; and
4. (4) the *logikoi* (words), *epinoiai* (attributes), and *theoremata* (names) of the *Logos*-Christ are 'divine intentionalities that illuminate a soul's quest for unity with divinity' (on these mind–language predicates of the *Logos*-Christ, see Wolinski 1995: 465–94).

As love, bread, and light, these divine attributes intentionally direct human thought and speech towards first principles. The optimum way to 'intentionally' trigger the *logikoi* (words), *epinoiai* (attributes), and *theoremata* (names) of the *Logos*-Christ is through contemplative prayer and exegesis of scripture (*CJn*, II.10.64–5). There are various noetic *epinoiai; logikoi* (*C.Cels.*, II.24), and *theoremata* of Christ (*CJn*, II.8). All of them denote *Logos* as he eternally is as Christ in the world. The amount of wisdom, light, and love souls receive depends on the degree they are capable of attaining self-realization within '*theia aisthesis*' (divine perception: *H.Gn*, I.8). Hence, the *Logos* appears to different classes of souls according to their capacities. To the sick he will appear as healer, to those needing guidance he appears as shepherd, and his appearance as Wisdom and Life is kept for the perfect and is shown to the extent to which the *Logos* is proportionate to their likeness to him (for the construction of a Christian 'self-identity' on the basis of such parsing, see Munkholt Christensen 2015).

## Beyond Limits

The passages that state Origen's epistemology of theology best are those in his epistemology of prayer (*On Prayer*, I.1). The *Homilies on Leviticus* contains a blunt claim, but in rather cryptic language, concerning contemplative prayer:

> I think that he is said to 'chew the cud' who gives his effort to knowledge and meditates on the law of the Lord day and night.
>
> (Origen, *Hom.Lev.*, VII.6)

In Origen's aesthetics of prayer, thinking and speaking *of* first principles is noetically associated aesthetically with sights, smells, sounds, tastes, and touch. His epistemology of theology is grounded in a twofold aesthetics of prayer that proposes not only a visual, tactile, sonic, and olfactory *noesis* but also a contemplative *praxis*. This *noesis* and *praxis* of sights, smells, sounds, tastes, and touch become logically possible within prayer by contemplatively applying the categories of substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, and position (see *On Prayer*, VI.1). Since Origen is keen to synthesize the language of mental and physical properties, to attempt a *henosis* between mental and physical states, contemplative prayer often involves a non-propositional and non-discursive 'naming'; a noetic earthiness, wherein light, smoke, ringing, smoothness, food, drink, and sex 'call' forth an *episteme* of first principles through an aesthetics of prayer. There is an immense bibliography on prayer, but little on prayer and *episteme* (for an epistemology of contemplative prayer in its Neoplatonic contexts, see Addey 2014: 137–42; and Berchman 1991: 184–216).

In *On Prayer*, Origen distinguishes four types of prayer according to traditional *topoi* of invention: praise, thanksgiving, confession, and petition (O'Cleirig 1995: 277–86). He also distinguishes between petitionary prayer for earthly goods and for spiritual goods (O'Meara 1954: 7). The highest form of prayer is contemplative, utilizing a '*ennoeo ton theon*' or '*theoreo*' formulae. Things worth praying for have a 'true and intelligible character' ([*ton alethinon kai noeton: On Prayer*, XIV.17) for contemplative prayer is not merely many words (*polulogia*), nor merely just words (*logoi*), but *Logos* revealing itself to *logos*. Through contemplative prayer a soul participates within a divine *noesis noeseos*:

> But whoever has contemplated [*ho tetheorekos*]
> the better and more divine things, which are necessary
> to Him, will obtain the objects of His contemplation
> [*on tetheoreke*], for they are known of God, and are
> known to the Father even before they are requested.
>
> (*On Prayer*, XXI.2)

This is so:

> For the eyes are lifted up from interest in
> earthly things … they look beyond whatever
> is begotten and contemplate [*ennoein*]
> God alone, and hold modest converse with
> the one who hears them. Such people afford
> the greatest benefit … being transformed
> into the image.
>
> (*On Prayer*, IX.2)

In the *arton epiousion* of the Lord's Prayer, Origen not only allegorically combines the image of 'heavenly bread' or the 'bread of life' with the fourth line of the Lord's Prayer 'on earth as it is in heaven', he also employs property language, and an early version of the conceivability argument to show how a soul can contemplatively direct itself towards a union with God and *Logos*. There are many examples of Origen's use of property language and the conceivability argument in his *Commentaries* and *Homilies* (the *Song of Songs*, 3:5; 14:3; *Exodus*, 7:4; *Judges*, 6:2; and *Ezekiel*, 14:3). Mental and physical property languages are conflated, whenever Origen reflects on the mediatory role of Christ 'who as the Word made flesh, comes to redeem all flesh'. Here he combines the image of a noetic *epiousion* with a mind–language unity that yields a human–divine nourishing:

> We must therefore think here of *ousia* as being the
> same nature as bread. And just as material bread
> which is used for the body of him who is being
> nourished enters into his substance, so the living bread
> and that which came down from heaven offered
> to the mind and soul, gives a share of its own proper power
> to him who presents himself to be nourished by it.
>
> (*On Prayer*, XXVII.9)

Since *epiousion* is a heavenly food from Jesus himself, who receives his food from the Father alone, without the intervention of any other being, 'living bread' (*epiousion*) is a noetic bread intended for 'noetic man' (*noetos anthropos*) alone. Mentioned only briefly in the Gospels, and the Didache (8.2), *epiousios* generated ample discussion after Origen (Metzger 1968: 64–6; Chase 2004: 42–58). Among its many activities, it nourishes the soul's rationality, the highest form of which is contemplation (*theoria; On Prayer*, XIII.213).

Origen introduces a version of the 'conceivability argument' to complement his mixed-property 'language game'. Since the soul needs to contemplatively pray to attain a unity with first principles, and the *arton epiousion* offers a way by which a soul can intentionally direct itself towards receiving the *Logos* incarnate as *epiousion*, any soul nourished, sustained, and shaped by *Logos* possesses not only divine *ousia*, but a *henosis* with divinity when the soul eats the 'Word made Flesh' as noetic or 'Heavenly Bread' (De Lubac 2007: 397–8, 406–16). In receiving the Eucharist, the soul and first principles share all properties in common. To support such a mixed-property language game, Origen quotes Jesus's words at John 10:30 and 4:32: 'I have meat to eat which you do not know' … [and since] … 'I and the Father are one', the *Logos*-Christ is the meat or nourishment for rational souls (*On Prayer*, XII.204). His notion of spiritual or noetic development unites the 'true bread' (Jn. 6:32) with the 'true man' (Gen. 1:27; *On Prayer*, XXVII.2). In nuce, Jesus as living bread is the nourishing element of the true man. By 'eating' the *epiousion*, a soul receives Christ and shares in his divine properties. A meeting of the soul in Christ is both culinary and:

> Just as the Priest does not eat food in his own house
> or in any other place but the Holies of Holies, so my
> Savior alone eats bread … while no one is able [to eat]
> when he eats, he draws me to eat with him. I stand
> and knock … .
>
> (*Hom.Ez.* XX.VII.2)

The *Logos*-Christ replies:

> The bread I will give is my flesh, which I will give
> for the life of the soul.
>
> (*On Prayer*, XXVII.4)

Referencing Exodus 19:5 (in LXX): 'you shall be to me a particular people out of all the nations', Origen also plays on the etymological similarities between *epiousios* and *periousios* (they both derive from *ousia: On Prayer*, XXVII.7). He notes that while *epiousios* metaphysically denotes divine and human *ousia* uniting, *periousios* also refers to the ecclesiastical unity of the new Israel or church partaking in the *ousia* of God. God's people are made into his *periousios*—'as those abiding with the *ousia* of God' and partaking of it. The emphasis here is on the *I* and the *We* character of *noesis noeseos*.

In a fragment from a letter written by Ambrose to Origen, a *praxis* of prayer emerges that fills out not only Origen's epistemology of theology, but his aesthetics or epistemology of prayer as well. Employing the categories of substance, quantity, quality, time, place, position, relation, and modality, Origen proposes a spatio-temporal map of when and how to pray. Meals were to be accompanied by reading scripture. Since the posture of the body images the qualities of the soul in prayer, the best way to pray while eating is to extend hands with eyes elevated. Prayer could be conducted while sitting or lying down, if the person is ill. The corner of the house should serve as a sanctuary for both individual and communal prayer. In commenting on the direction of prayer Origen advocates facing towards the East while praying which indicates the soul is looking towards the dawn of the true Light, the Sun of justice and salvation (light is not mere metaphor for Origen and Plotinus. Light has ontological status, see Beierwaltes 1961: 334–62).

Contemplative *praxis* matters, especially since it achieves an 'affective displacement' that delivers the soul to its *telos*—a vision of first principles where the soul intentionally thinks and speaks empirical reality away (for Neoplatonic parallels, see Addey 2014: 70–1; 137–42; Rappe 1996: 259–66). This fracturing of the operations of propositional and discursive reasoning opens the embodied soul up to the divine within. The conclusions of propositional thought and discursive language, though cogent, cannot be grasped by a noetic soul within grasp of the divine. Through the mixture of mental and physical property language, the soul acquires a divine 'imagery'. The practice of contemplative prayer brings into consciousness aesthetic images that allow not only for a suspension of ordinary thought and language, but a union of properties between knowing human subject and known divine object, as far as that might be possible.

One does not need either a purely early Christian or even Gnostic reference to grasp this nuance. It can be explained by an epistemology of theology proper to the Platonic–Aristotelian philosopher at prayer. Origen shares much with Philo of Alexandria on devotional study, and with Maximus of Tyre, Plotinus, and Porphyry on prayer. Whether or not the soul is undescended, Origen claims that it remains attached to the intelligible mentally and physically through prayer (*PeriArch.*, IV.1.7).

## NEGATIONS

Although Origen sees the human mind (the 'interior self') as being as close to first principles as anything generated, human thought and language confront severe limits when mapping the divine (*PeriArch.*, IV.1.35–6). As a result, he carefully, but conventionally, parses the manner of selecting terms for theological and anthropological negation (for parallels in Plotinus and Augustine, see Schroeder 2012: 147–60). Negation and affirmation are processes of ascent and descent that are epistemological, logical, psychological, and linguistic on one level, and ontological on another. Hence, negation and affirmation are epistemologically causative or generative. Negation is the more important of the two and takes on a variety of thought and language meanings: denial (*apophasis*)—marking higher and lower positions within an ontological continuum; abstraction (*aphaeresis*)—the removal or addition of predicates or properties in ascent and descent within reality; privation (*steresis*)—the removal of predicates or properties manifesting descent within the order of being; otherness (*heterotes*)—negation as alterity; and opposition (*enantiotes)*]—negation as contrariety.

Since Origen's negative theology and negative anthropology are largely a matter of the limits for mind and language in expressing first principles, he offers a 'sigetic–discursive' model of 'negative theology', largely derived from Philo Judaeus and Clement of Alexandria (Mortley 1986; Carabine 1995). He does not propose the negation of divine intelligibility or being (Gersh 2006: 52–4). His theology and anthropology are 'negative' in the sense that to think and speak *of* first principles involves denial, abstraction, and privation alterity, and contrariety of the divine itself (these tropes are also evident in Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius, Proclus, and Damascius; see Gersh 2006: 52 n. 85).

Origen's negative anthropology complements his negative theology (for parallels in Plotinus and Augustine, see Schroeder 2012: 147–60). Abstraction (*aphaeresis*) is key here. If the human being is made in God's image and approaches the divine by negating that image, then negation is used of the image as much as of the original. Although the soul in the contemplative practice of prayer is aware of its iconic character, it attempts to abolish that icon and enter into unity with the *Logos*. As the soul negates itself as self, it enters as *nous-logos* into *Logos* itself. In contemplative prayer, the self is dialectically negated and affirmed, all ordinary self-consciousness is overcome, and a higher self emerges. By negating its earthly image (*eikon*), it affirms its heavenly substance (*ousia*). That is to say, when the soul in contemplative practice of prayer becomes aware of its iconic character, it abolishes that icon and enters into unity with *Logos*. The *praxis* of prayer is epistemically instrumental insofar as it aids in thinking away corporeal reality and thus in breaking up ordinary propositional and discursive reasoning. This leads to a noetic illumination based on a divine presence within. *Gnothi seauton* generates a 'higher' habit of mind and language. In an act of negative-affective displacement the soul empties itself and achieves, non-propositionally and non-discursively, *homoiosis theo*.

Origen claims that knowing is not a matter of understanding reality propositionally from the 'outside in', in an indirect perceptual, phenomenal, phenomenological, or linguistic way (or the mind as 'perceiving model'). Rather, knowing is a matter of understanding reality from the 'inside out', in a direct, noetic way (or the mind as 'nousing model'). The crucial distinction is that perceptual knowing is indirect. It involves a perception of empirical reality through sensations and ideas tied to ordinary propositional thought and discursive language. Noetic knowing is direct. It involves intellection, cognition of the causal structure of reality, tied to an ideal non-propositional thought and non-discursive language, which not merely 'perceives' facts but 'touches' Forms and First causes (for a distinction between 'seeing' and 'touching' divine reality in Aristotle and Plotinus, see Berchman 2005: 69–94). Moreover, since Origen is keen to emphasize that thought and language are 'directed towards' or 'about something', the aboutness, directedness, or intentionality of contemplative prayer results in an epistemological claim that all objective reality is grounded in the intentionality of 'negative' first principles apprehended in a 'negative' *nous-logos* consciousness. Here the nature and possibility of knowledge and language are affirmed without Descartes's explicit reflection on the problem of the subject to whom knowledge is communicated, or through whom knowledge and language come to be where subjectivity is the key to objectivity (on distinctions among the different languages of metaphysics, see Berchman 2007: 175–90).

## Conclusions

Origen's contributions to the epistemology of theology are significant. He offers a series of 'ultimate presuppositions' to anchor his epistemology of theology: primarily the principle that actuality precedes potentiality, the prior simplicity principle (mind is prior to matter), the analytic–synthetic and a priori–a posteriori distinctions, and the principle that logical possibility precedes causal possibility (Collingwood 1941/1998: 1–41). Key claims are that first principles are characterized by formal causality; that human thought and language are limited but characterized by intentionality; and that exegesis and prayer are thought experiments in logical possibility that expand the horizons of ordinary thought and language, offering an ideal knowledge and speech that is: a priori, presuppositional, non-propositional discursive (in exegesis), and non-discursive (in prayer). Here, decisively, non-propositional thought and non-discursive language offer optimal access to the divine. On such foundations, Origen proposes an epistemology of theology grounded in an epistemology of prayer whose acme is a knowing, speaking, and practising of first principles non-propositionally and non-discursively.

The correlation of divine and human modes of intentional consciousness with the intentional objects correlative to them constitutes one of Origen's major contributions to the epistemology of theology. It results in a more profound grounding of apriority in the history of epistemology of theology than previously ventured. Origen opens up and broadens Aristotle's *episteme* to an immense field of so-called divine intentionalities exemplified in the substantiality of all of Christ's substances. In nuce, following Aristotle and Alexander, Origen claims that being–substance can only be grasped 'intentionally' or 'with intentionality' by mind. The aboutness, directedness, or intentionality of contemplative prayer results in his epistemological claim that all objective reality is grounded in the intentionality of first principles, specifically of the actuality of *Logos* in *logos* consciousness. Indeed, first principles cannot be grasped without *nous-logos*, nor would *episteme* (knowledge) be *sophia* (wisdom) had not *Logos* intentionally joined with *episteme*, allowing access to the noetic *epinoiai* (attributes), *logikoi* (words), and *theoremata* (meanings) of Christ.

In Origen's causal approach, the 'substantiality' of God and *Logos* are *final* as well as *formal*—otherwise an epistemology of theology and prayer would be impossible. Since Origen is inextricably tied to the Platonic–Aristotelian doctrine that Being–Intellect is primal, and thinking and speaking are causally *constitutive* of reality and human experience, his mind, language, and metaphysical claims are not only commensurable with those of Aristotle, Alexander, and Plotinus, but anticipate modern epistemological problems as well. In summary, since Origen's epistemology is primarily *of* theology and *of* first philosophy, and secondarily a theory of knowledge, his foundationalist epistemology is distinct from the phenomenalist epistemologies of sense, sensation, and sensibility commensurate with Descartes, Hobbes, Holbach, Le Mettrie, Locke, Hume, and Russell, or the phenomenological epistemologies of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merlou-Ponty (Berchman 2007: 175–90). This means Origen approaches the nature and possibility of knowledge and language without Descartes's explicit reflection on the problem of the subject to whom knowledge is communicated, or through whom knowledge and language comes to be, where subjectivity is the key to objectivity.

Two questions implicitly asked of Origen at the beginning of this study can now be explicitly answered: (1) are mind and language isomorphic with reality or not? and (2) are physical states ontologically dependent on mental states? His reply is: since, there are limits to ordinary (propositional) thought and (discursive) language, neither are isomorphic with reality. However, there are also limits to ideal (non-propositional) thought and (non-discursive) language. Both are isomorphic with reality but only in the mind–language states and properties of contemplative prayer. While physical states are ontologically dependent on mental states, there is an interchangeable property language that mental and physical states share. Here Origen implies that, apart from propositional and discursive arguments concerning first principles, there are non-propositional and non-discursive techniques by which a soul approaches and attains unity with the divine.

If this account of the scope and limits of thought and language holds, then Origen must consider a complementary task, namely of showing *how* any expression, whether pictoral or not, acquires significance by being given a use or a *praxis* in life. His proposal appears to be that in thinking and practising contemplative prayer, God and *Logos* are intentionally 'shown' 'silently'—or non-propositionally and non-discursively. This is because there is no self-explanatory and immediately 'recognizable' reference between thought, language, and reality: 'the mind–language reference problem'. The crucial question now becomes: How do minds establish the links they do between thought and language on the one hand, and the real world on the other? Here Origen appears to propose that the expressions in our language acquire their specific *meanings* from the procedures by which we give them definite *uses* in our practical 'touching' of the divine and the world, not from their inner articulation alone, nor in any 'pictorial' characteristics of thought and speech either. Hence, he leaves us with the task of 'showing' how any thought or language expression, whether 'pictorial' or 'tactile', acquires significance by being given a *use* in life.

However tentatively, it might be suggested that Origen's approach to language anticipates Wittgenstein's notion of speech as that which is 'shown' not 'said' (Wittgenstein 1998: 6.4.5; 6.53–7) and Heidegger's 'hint' that a language of being ends in a 'silence about silence' (Heidegger 1962: 227). Since nothing can be known *about* propositionally, or spoken *of* discursively about reality at all, Origen, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger share recognition of the limits of mind and language in the mapping of a mind-independent reality. Thus, although Origen's commitments to any version of Wittgenstein's ordinary-language or Heidegger's theory-of-meaning approaches to mind and language are bracketed, he anticipates their concerns regarding 'the mind–language reference problem' as well (Wittgenstein 1998: 6.57; Heidegger 1962: 32–4).

This is best seen dialectically, where for Origen each thought and action has as an implicit negative and an implicit affirmative moment in the *concept* and *act* of contemplative prayer. In the *praxis* of prayer, silence is elevated above speech while in the *noesis* of prayer, silence is demoted below speech. Thus Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's thought and language models appear anticipatorily in two different versions of Origen's epistemology of prayer—whether silence is identified with thought and elevated above speech (following Clement of Alexandria), or whether silence is elevated above speech as identified with thought (anticipating Gregory of Nyssa), for prayer as meaning involves 'remaining silent about that which cannot be spoken of'. In this context, silence and speech are sometimes associated by Origen—with what cannot be said and sometimes deontically—with what should not be said.

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## CHAPTER 22

# AUGUSTINE

SCOTT MACDONALD

In his great autobiographical work the *Confessions*, Augustine describes how his encounter as a teenager with Cicero's *Hortensius* set him ablaze with a desire for wisdom. The *Hortensius* (now largely lost except for fragments preserved in Augustine's own writings) was an exhortation to philosophy, to a life guided by and imbued with a love of wisdom. Augustine tells us that that was the decisive moment at which he raised himself up—like the prodigal son in Luke's gospel—and began a long journey in search of wisdom; a search that would eventually lead him to the God of catholic Christianity and the satisfaction of his deepest desire (*Confessions* 3.4.7–8 in Chadwick 1998). Augustine thinks of wisdom as the truth (or a set of truths) expressing the deep structure and fundamental constituents of reality and, most fundamentally, identifying the highest good and how it might be attained. To search for wisdom, then, is to search for this truth. To discover it and attain the highest good is happiness, the restless human heart's ultimate rest (*On Free Choice of the Will* 2.8.26 in Williams 1993).

Augustine's journey in search of wisdom, with all its moral and intellectual twists and turns, is the theme that drives the narrative of the *Confessions* forward. Augustine's epistemological views emerge and evolve over the course of that journey as he considers not only various claims to wisdom but also what it is to search for wisdom and what it might be to come to know it. The critical junctures are marked by his most distinctive and important epistemological discoveries.

## THE CERTAINTY OF YOUTH

Augustine's search for wisdom begins with his encounters with the prominent competing world views in the Roman North Africa of his youth, namely, catholic Christianity and the syncretistic gnosticism of the Manichaeans. Immediately after his encounter with the *Hortensius*, Augustine turned to the religion of his childhood and began reading the Christian scriptures. He found them unsatisfying. As a budding rhetorician, he was put off by their coarse style. But more importantly, he was disappointed that they left important intellectual questions unresolved (e.g. the origin of evil) and appalled by what he took to be the morally repugnant behaviour of the Old Testament patriarchs. He concluded that true wisdom was not to be found in Christianity.

He turned next to the Manichaeans whose morally rigorous way of life and elaborate dualistic cosmology appealed to both his moral sensibilities and his intellectual inclinations. He found especially attractive the Manichaeans' promise of secure epistemic grounding for their account of reality. In contrast with the catholic Christians, whom the Manichaeans ridiculed for insisting that Christian doctrine must be accepted by faith, the Manichaeans promised a world view grounded on nothing but the certainty of reason. Over the decade that Augustine spent with the Manichaeans he came to see that that promise was empty—the rational proofs never emerged. Moreover, the Manichaean world view itself began to look suspect to him. He claims eventually to have found a compelling argument demonstrating an inconsistency among fundamental tenets of the Manichaean system, and he set off again in search of wisdom.

Manichaean shortcomings notwithstanding, Augustine remained convinced that intellectual assent must be grounded in certainty.

> Fearing a precipitate plunge, I kept my heart from giving any assent, and in that state of suspended judgement I was suffering a worse death. I wanted to be as certain about things I could not see as I am certain that seven and three are ten. I was not so mad as to think that I could consider even that to be something unknowable. But I desired other things to be as certain as this truth, whether physical objects which were not immediately accessible to my senses, or spiritual matters which I knew no way of thinking about except in physical terms.
>
> (*Confessions* 6.4.6 in Chadwick 1998)

Convinced that intellectual assent must be grounded in certainty, Augustine was next drawn to Academic scepticism. The sceptics advocated withholding assent where philosophical and theological matters are concerned precisely because they believed certainty about such matters to be impossible. Finding himself now at a loss with regard to where certainty might be found and sharing the sceptics' criterion for assent, Augustine was attracted to the sceptical conclusion that one should withhold assent altogether.

His scepticism, however, was short-lived, as two important considerations undermined his commitment to it. First, he observed that there are in fact truths that can be known with certainty. He offers as examples mathematical and logical truths such as '7 + 3 = 10' and 'there is one world or it is not the case that there is one world', but also propositions about value and morality such as 'what is incorruptible is better than what is corruptible' and 'we should live justly' (*Against the Academicians* 3.11.26 in King 1995; *On Free Choice of the Will* 2.8.20–1, 2.10.28–9 in Williams 1993). Eventually, convinced by Platonist arguments he first encountered at Milan, Augustine came to believe that certain knowledge of these sorts of truths rests both on the nature of the propositions themselves and their constituents—their necessity, immutability, eternality, and mind-independence—and on our direct intellectual awareness of them. Augustine groups together with these objective necessary truths a small group of contingent propositions such as 'I exist' and 'I seem to see white' (*Against the Academicians* 3.11.26 in King 1995; *On the Trinity* 10.3.14, 15.4.21 in Matthews and McKenna 2002). Certain knowledge of these propositions about our immediate experience is grounded in the nature of the mind itself and its access to its own nature, states, and activities. For example, I can be certain that I exist when I consider the matter because, even on the supposition that I am mistaken in thinking that I exist, it follows that I exist (*City of God* 11.26 in Dyson 1998; *On the Trinity* 15.4.21 in Matthews and McKenna 2002).

Augustine adopted from Platonism a powerful model for understanding the nature of knowledge. According to that model, reason (or mind) is a capacity for intellectual vision: the intellectual grasping of some object or proposition is a kind of intellectual seeing (*Soliloquies* 1.6.12 in Paffenroth 2000). The central epistemological idea in this model is that intellectual seeing—direct acquaintance or direct cognitive contact of the knower with what is known—is the paradigm and foundation of knowledge. The model's focal analogy articulates this idea: just as the bodily eye sees visible corporeal objects when they are present and illumined by sunlight, the mind's eye 'sees' intelligible objects when the conditions are right, where the right conditions include the presence or activity of a kind of intelligible light. The analogy gives us purchase on the notion of direct cognitive contact: for the mind (or reason) to be directly acquainted with an object is for that object to be present to it under the right conditions. Moreover, this notion of direct acquaintance explains why our knowledge of some kinds of object admits of certainty. Because these objects are immediately present to the mind when it is directly acquainted with them, it cannot be mistaken about them and their evident properties and relations. Augustine therefore accepts an ontology that includes objects directly perceptible to the mind alone—the intelligibles—which are themselves necessary, immutable, eternal, and independent of our minds. The presence of these intelligibles to the mind in the right conditions grounds our certain knowledge of them and of necessary truths about them. Other kinds of objects—the mind itself and its states and activities—are immediately present to one's own mind as well, and, in the right conditions, ground our indubitable contingent judgements about our own existence and subjective states. Since the focal analogy requires that the relevant objects be illumined (by a source of light—the sun in the base case of sensory vision), this account of our intellective knowledge is sometimes called Augustine's theory of 'illumination'. Insofar as one identifies the analogue to the sun in the case of intellectual vision with God—as Augustine sometimes does—it can be called a theory of 'divine illumination' (*Soliloquies* 1.8.15 in Paffenroth 2000; *The Teacher* 11.36–13.46 in King 1995).

The identification of what Augustine takes to be bulletproof instances of epistemic certainty shows that no sort of global or universal scepticism can be true—some certainty is indeed possible. Augustine and the sceptics, then, can continue to agree that one ought to assent only to what is certain. Commitment to that epistemic principle, which drew Augustine first to the Manichaeans and then to the Academics, is the constant touchstone of his youthful search for wisdom. But on the question of whether any certain knowledge is possible for us, Augustine parts ways with the sceptics. A second significant development in Augustine's epistemology constitutes a more dramatic move away from scepticism and paves the way for his intellectual reconciliation with catholic Christianity.

## RATIONAL ASSENT WITHOUT CERTAINTY

After rejecting scepticism, Augustine never looks back. He maintains consistently throughout his writings both a theory of illumination and his view that we have certain knowledge of at least some propositions. But he makes a dramatic epistemic turn when he abandons the principle that the only sort of legitimate epistemic assent is to what one can claim to be certain of. He comes to believe that intellectual assent can be legitimate or rational even in the absence of certainty.

Augustine came to see that if epistemic assent requires certainty, then a vast quantity of our ordinary beliefs must be illegitimate. All our beliefs about events that occurred before we were born, geographical locations that we have never visited, and the existence and contents of other people's minds lack the requisite sort of certainty. These beliefs are grounded in the testimony of others, and by its very nature testimony cannot provide certainty. Augustine, however, thinks we can be justified in holding many of these beliefs. To begin, we have a kind of practical justification for accepting other people's testimony: we could not get on in the world or in our social relationships if we were unwilling to take other people at their word. But more significantly, we can have epistemic justification for accepting some testimony by virtue of the fact that reason can help us distinguish legitimate from illegitimate, expert from bogus, authority. We can, then, have good epistemic grounds for accepting what legitimate authorities tell us. But since no belief accepted on authority is known with certainty, it will follow that it can be legitimate or rational to assent to propositions that are not known with certainty (*The Advantage of Believing* 22–3 in Teske et al. 2010; *Confessions* 6.5.7–8 in Chadwick 1998; *On the Trinity* 15.4.21 in Matthews and McKenna 2002).

The distinction between what we might call first-hand and second-hand access to the facts, between observing something for oneself and relying on someone else's report about it, is critically important for Augustine, for whom direct cognitive contact of the knower with what is known is the paradigm and foundation of knowledge. Only first-hand observation can provide direct cognitive contact between the potential knower and the thing to be known. Reliance on a second-hand report places the potential knower at one remove (at least) from the thing to be known. In allowing that rational assent might include not only assent based on reason's direct acquaintance with facts that make a given proposition true (as in the case of '7 + 3 = 10' and 'I exist') but also assent on the basis of legitimate testimony, Augustine is allowing that rational assent might admit of distinct *kinds* of justification (first-hand and second-hand) but also significantly different *degrees* or *levels* of justification (certainty when assent is based on reason's direct acquaintance with the facts, something substantially less than certainty when assent is based on legitimate testimony).

The common-sense distinction between first-hand observation and second-hand report raises the question of the epistemic status of sense perception, since the very notion of first-hand observation derives from cases involving sense experience. (Correspondingly, the analogy at the heart of Augustine's doctrine of illumination takes sense experience—vision—as its base case.) In his early writings, Augustine shares a general Platonist suspicion of sense perception: its objects are mutable and ever-changing, and its results are accordingly unreliable and untrustworthy. In later writings, however, he comes to view the epistemic standing of sense perception as similar to that of testimony:

> Far be it from us to doubt the truth of those things we have perceived through the senses of the body. For through them we have learned of the heavens and the earth, and those things in them which are known to us insofar as He, who has also created us and them, wanted them to become known to us. Far be it also from us to deny what we have learned from the testimony of others; otherwise, we would not know that there is an ocean; we would not know that there are lands and cities which the most celebrated fame commends; we would not know of the men and their works which we have learned in the reading of history; we would not know the news that is daily brought to us from everywhere, and is confirmed by evidence that is consistent and convincing; finally, we would not know in what places and from what persons we were born; because we have believed all of these things on the testimonies of others. But it is most absurd to deny this, and we must confess that, not only the senses of our own bodies, but also those of other persons have added very much to our knowledge.
>
> (*On the Trinity* 15.4.21 in Matthews and McKenna 2002)

So in Augustine's considered view, sense perception as well as testimony can ground rational assent.

Augustine clearly articulates these distinctions among kinds and degrees of epistemic justification, and explicitly regiments a vocabulary for tracking them. He tells us that in the most general sense, to believe (*credere*) a proposition is to think or entertain that proposition with assent (*cogitare cum assensu*)—or, more simply put, to assent to that proposition. In a narrower sense, to believe (*credere*) a proposition is to assent to that proposition specifically on the basis of testimony. Hence, '*credere*' can signify either the genus of epistemic assent or one of its species. By contrast, to understand (*intelligere*) a proposition is to assent to that proposition specifically on the basis of reason's direct acquaintance with the facts that make the proposition true. The expression 'to know' (*scire*), like the expression 'to believe' (*credere*), can be used in a broad or strict sense (*Revisions* 1.14.3 in Ramsey 2010). Strictly speaking, to know a proposition is to understand it, that is, to assent to it on the basis of reason. But in a broad sense, we can be said to know not only what we assent to on the basis of reason but also what we assent to on the basis of legitimate testimony and sense perception. What is striking here is

Augustine's allowance that it can be rational to assent to propositions on the basis of legitimate testimony, and that one can be said, at least broadly speaking, to know (*scire*) such propositions. In taking this path Augustine parts ways not only with the Academics but with every other ancient epistemological tradition.

Augustine sometimes uses the term 'faith' (*fides*) as a synonym for '*credere*' in its narrow sense, to mean 'assent on the basis of testimony'. (Since there is no noun in Latin cognate to the verb '*credere*', '*fides*' often plays that role.) On this usage, 'faith' designates a purely cognitive propositional attitude. But he also sometimes uses 'faith' to designate the more complex state in virtue of which a person is a genuine adherent of Christianity, a state which is partly cognitive—involving assent to a particular set of propositions—but also significantly conative or volitional—involving a state of one's will, love for God, and a practical commitment to a particular way of life.

Augustine, then, comes to believe that there can be rational belief or faith. But when is it rational to assent to a given proposition on the basis of testimony? Augustine does not develop a systematic account, but what he says suggests criteria that fit naturally into his general epistemic framework. Does the report come from an eyewitness or originate with an eyewitness, someone with first-hand experience of the facts? Is the reporter appropriately connected to an eyewitness? Are there features of the reporter's character or situation or the transmission of the report that bear on its reliability? Augustine argues that we can be rational in assenting to propositions about things that are beyond our own first-hand experience when we have good reason to believe that what is reported to us by others is likely to be accurate (*The Advantage of Believing* 22 in Teske et al. 1995; *Confessions* 6.5.7–8 in Chadwick 1998; *On the Trinity* 15.4.21 in Matthews and McKenna 2002).

Augustine sometimes suggests that he is moved to defend the rationality of assent based on testimony in order to defend the rationality of an enormously broad array of ordinary beliefs. But one particular application of this defence is critical in his search for wisdom. Christianity's demand that its adherents accept by faith Christian doctrine as it is expressed in scripture and the creeds will be entirely reasonable, and Christians who comply with that demand will do so rationally, if the Christian scriptures and the church are epistemically legitimate authorities. Augustine argues that the testimony of the scriptures and the church is in fact legitimate: he believes, for example, that the historical reports in the New Testament originate with credible eyewitnesses to historical events, and that the Christian church is connected by an unbroken causal chain with participants in Christianity's foundational events. Moreover, Augustine believes that the rapid spread of Christianity and the miracles that have accompanied that spread are evidence of its divine sponsorship and hence its reliability. Thus, Augustine's development of a notion of rational assent to testimony clears a critical epistemic obstacle that had blocked his acceptance of Christianity: 'You [God] persuaded me that the defect lay not with those who believed your books, which you have established with such great authority among almost all nations, but with those who did not believe them' (*Confessions* 6.5.7 in Chadwick 1998).

## BELIEF AND UNDERSTANDING

Augustine's taxonomy of epistemic states codifies an important set of distinctions. But he has a special interest in one of these distinctions in particular: the distinction between belief or believing (*credere*) strictly so called—assent on the basis of testimony—and understanding (*intelligere*)—assent on the basis of reason's direct awareness of relevant facts. From his earliest writings to his last, Augustine remains eager to distinguish these two states: it is one thing to believe; it is another to understand. (For the remainder of this chapter, the terms 'belief' and 'believe' will be used in Augustine's narrower sense to mean 'assent specifically on the basis of testimony'.)

Augustine's distinction between belief and understanding is the theoretical analogue of the common-sense distinction between a second-hand report and first-hand observation. Consider a simple example (which is not one Augustine himself uses). Let P be the proposition expressing the Pythagorean theorem—that the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the triangle's other two sides. A given epistemic subject, call her S1, might *believe* P, that is, assent to it on the basis of someone's say-so—for example, having read P in a geometry textbook or having been assured of its truth by a teacher. Another epistemic subject, S2, might *understand* P, that is, assent to it not (or not only) on the basis of someone's say-so but on the basis of a grasp of the proof of the theorem. Both S1 and S2 assent to P but on different grounds. Both have evidence for the truth of P, but unlike S1's evidence, S2's evidence reveals the necessity of P by manifesting the deep, necessary connections between P and the fundamental, immutable truths of geometry (which S2 also grasps in grasping the proof). In grasping the proof of the theorem, then, S2 is directly acquainted with P's place in the structure of geometric reality and the facts which ultimately make P not only true but necessarily true. S2's epistemic grounds with respect to P are, therefore, both stronger and richer than S1's. They make S2's assent to P certain, and hence an instance of knowing strictly speaking, and also provide S2 herself with robust and fundamental facts that are essential to P and explanatory of P's necessity. So believing is one thing; understanding is another. Moreover, for the reasons just articulated, Augustine argues that we should in general prefer understanding to (mere) belief, epistemically speaking, and should seek it where and to the extent possible. Still, despite its shortcomings relative to understanding, belief might nevertheless be rational and count as knowledge (broadly speaking).

Examples from mathematics are especially well suited to illustrate the way in which reason's direct acquaintance with intelligible objects and facts can be thought of as constituting what Augustine calls *understanding*. But he thinks that his notion of understanding has application in other domains as well, including in certain kinds of theological reflection. He recognizes that in general our epistemic access to truth will depend not only on our own cognitive conditions but also on the nature of the truths themselves and their constituent objects.

> There are three kinds of [propositions] that can be believed. There are some that are always believed and never understood. Every account that ranges over temporal events and human deeds is of this kind. There are others that are believed as soon as

> they are understood. All human reasonings, whether about numbers or having to do with any of the disciplines, are of this kind. Thirdly, there are those that are believed first and understood afterwards. Of this kind are those that deal with divine matters which cannot be understood except by people who are pure of heart. And this is brought about by observing precepts that are accepted as rules for living rightly.
>
> (*Responses to Miscellaneous Questions* q. 48; 75.1–10 in Ramsey 2008; tr. Kretzmann 1990, modified)

Many of the fundamental propositions constitutive of the Christian faith fall into the first of these three classes. That Jesus Christ was crucified, for example, refers to a historical event accessible to those who were not present at the time only through the reports of others. But Augustine thinks there are many propositions dealing with divine matters that can also be understood. Insofar as these latter propositions are essential to Christian faith, they must be believed by Christians—accepted on the authority of the Bible and the church. In that sense, belief is prior to understanding—these propositions are 'believed first and understood afterwards'. Augustine notes that since assent to the Christian creed on the basis of authority is the entryway to Christianity, Christianity is not restricted to those capable of the sort of sophisticated intellectual reflection required for understanding. Nevertheless, for those who believe, who have the requisite abilities and opportunity, and whose hearts are pure (more on this requirement in the section headed 'Seeking with a Pure Heart', below), it is possible to attain understanding of many important theological truths (*Letters* 120.2.8 in Teske 2002).

In contexts in which theological matters are under discussion, Augustine's reminder of the distinction between belief and understanding is typically prelude to an in-depth rational investigation of the issue at hand. It allows him to articulate the assumption that he and his interlocutor (and readers) are beginning from the position of belief—assent by virtue of Christian faith to the proposition (or set of propositions) at the heart of the discussion (that the existence of evil is compatible with God's goodness, for example, or that God exists or is three persons in one substance). Since understanding is different from (mere) belief, and since understanding is generally preferable from an epistemic point of view, Augustine exhorts his interlocutors (and readers) in these contexts to join him in seeking to understand what he and they already believe. The search for understanding that follows this exhortation proceeds by way of the application of reason to the issues at hand. The application of reason typically involves what might be characterized broadly as philosophical methods and tools: conceptual analysis, exposition, theory construction, explanation, and argument. The results of these investigations vary depending on the case (for examples, see the next section).

According to Augustine's view, then, intellectually minded believers can profitably apply reason in investigating some divine matters. He argues further that believers have not merely the opportunity but also the obligation to understand the truths of Christianity, to the extent that they are able. Failing to use reason to the fullest extent is a sinful repudiation of God's image in us (*Letters* 120.1.3 in Teske 2002). Augustine also claims biblical support for his claim that Christian believers have an obligation to pursue understanding of what they believe. He interprets Jesus's words in the sermon on the mount—'seek and you will find'—as both a command to believers to seek understanding and an assurance that God will grant the seeker success (*On Free Choice of the Will* 2.2.6 in Williams 1993). He tells us that it is belief that seeks and understanding that finds (*On the Trinity* 15.2.2 in Matthews and McKenna 2002). Moreover, he reads Paul's claim, that although we now live by faith we will one day see God face to face, as confirmation that the end and fulfilment of Christian belief is complete and unimpeded understanding of the divine nature and plan (*On the Trinity* 15.6.44–5 in Matthews and McKenna 2002).

Believers who undertake reasoned investigation of theological matters, however, must not only start from but also be guided by their antecedent assent to the truth of Christian doctrine. To start from one's Christian belief requires both taking one's Christian beliefs as the subject of one's investigation and also taking for granted the truth of those beliefs. To be guided by one's Christian belief involves both exploiting the conceptual and explanatory resources of a systematic Christian world view and working to ensure that the results of one's inquiry do not contradict Christian doctrine.

## Method in Philosophical Theology: Belief Seeking Understanding

Augustine presents virtually all his investigations into theological matters—short or extended, narrowly focused or wide ranging—as instances of belief seeking understanding. Two examples illustrate his execution of the general strategy.

### Paradox of Evil

In the dialogue *On Free Choice of the Will* (Williams 1993; translations in this section are my own), Augustine's interlocutor, Evodius, opens the discussion with a query: 'Tell me, if you will, is it true that God is not the author of evil?' Augustine recognizes the question as expressing the same puzzle as the one the Manichaeans of his youth had used to taunt Christians. When the Manichaeans asked, 'Where does evil come from?' they intended to be calling attention to an absurdity in Christian belief. Christians believe that:

(1) God is the highest good,
(2) everything that exists (other than God) comes from God, and
(3) only good comes from God, the highest good.

But they also acknowledge that:

(4) evil exists,

and in so doing are snared in logical inconsistency. If (1)–(3) are true, then evil cannot exist. If evil exists, then, given (1)–(3), where does (where could!) it come from? Call the set of propositions consisting of propositions (1)–(4) the paradox of evil.

When Augustine articulates the paradox of evil, Evodius exclaims: 'That is it! You have now clearly expressed what is troubling me. That is what has driven me to ask these questions'. Augustine continues:

> Take courage and hold on to what you believe. For there is nothing worthier of belief, even if the reason why the belief is true is hidden.... With these things in mind and praying for God's help, let us press forward in the way I have described towards an understanding of the issue that you have raised.

What Augustine and Evodius believe, in this case, is that God is the supremely good and sole creator (the Christian doctrine of creation) and that there is evil (a fundamental tenet of Christianity entailed by the belief that Christ died for our sins). What the ensuing lengthy investigation reveals is that propositions (1)–(4) expressing the paradox of evil are crude, indeed too crude to express adequately either Christian doctrine or philosophical truth. When the relevant realities—the divine nature, the nature of evil, and the Christian doctrine of creation—are carefully articulated, the resulting set of propositions is not the logically inconsistent set (1)–(4) but rather the following set:

(1) God is the highest good
(2*) all the substances or natures that comprise the universe have been created by God
(3) only good comes from the highest good
(4*) evil exists, but only as a corruption or defect or privation in a substance or nature

When proposition (2) in the paradox of evil is replaced by (2*)—which Augustine argues expresses accurately the Christian doctrine of creation—and proposition (4) is replaced by (4*)—which Augustine argues articulates correctly the nature of evil—the inconsistency vanishes. Christian belief can acknowledge that evil infects creation without thereby asserting that evil is one of God's creations.

Augustine's extended development of this particular resolution of the paradox of evil illustrates both the kinds of rational method he has in mind when he urges us to seek understanding and the content of the epistemic state we are in once we have achieved it. His analysis of the nature of evil—resulting in the substitution of (4*) for (4)—is an exercise in moral psychology and fundamental ontology that engages observations, conceptual analysis, and argument from the Platonist and Stoic traditions with which he is familiar. He argues that the fundamental evils on which all other evils depend are morally evil choices of rational beings, choices which are rationally defective and hence defects or privations in the rational beings whose choices they are. Just as blindness is a defect in an eye (or in a sighted being) and not a positive property of it, evil is a defect or privation in the beings it affects. Defects of this sort clearly exist—some people are blind—but the defects are ontologically parasitic on the beings they affect. Moreover, they are not merely ontologically dependent on the fundamental subjects or substances in which they inhere, they are constituted by the deprivation of something in their subjects. The presence of a defect in the subject it affects constitutes an ontological loss or diminution, a lack of being of a certain sort in the affected subject. For this reason Augustine claims that insofar as evils are corruptions or defects or privations, they are not themselves any of the kinds of substances or natures—entities with positive ontological standing—that comprise fundamental reality.

Similarly, Augustine comes to see that proposition (2) of the paradox of evil—that everything that exists (other than God) comes from God—expresses the Christian doctrine of creation inadequately. What Christian doctrine maintains is that God has created all of fundamental reality and all the substances or natures that comprise the universe (other than God). According to Christian belief, God created sighted beings and eyes and the capacity to see. Blindness, however, can come to be without God's creating it, by virtue of an eye's losing the capacity to see. More generally, defects can arise in creation, in the substances or natures created by God, without God's having created the defects themselves. Hence, (2*) rather than (2) is the philosophically accurate expression of the doctrine of creation. (The issue of whether a supremely good God can have permitted created substances or natures to be corrupted or suffer privation is another issue, which Augustine addresses separately.)

As this brief summary of Augustine's argument in *On Free Choice of the Will* shows, the methods and resources Augustine uses to pursue understanding in this case are those one might describe as the methods and resources of rational or philosophical inquiry generally.

His resolution of the paradox of evil also illustrates what it is to achieve understanding. In this particular case, achieving understanding consists, in the first place, in coming to see how an apparent inconsistency in Christian belief can be resolved. Propositions (1)–(4) are inconsistent, but careful analysis and reflection show that Christian doctrine is not committed to those propositions but to another, closely related but critically distinct, set of propositions which are not similarly inconsistent. In this particular case, moreover, achieving understanding involves more than the explicit resolution of the paradox. Resolving the paradox requires philosophical reflection and theorizing, the result of which is the discovery of important truths about the reality which Christian doctrine expresses—about God's nature, the fundamental ontological structures of creation, the nature of evil and that of rational creatures and their actions, and the place of those natures in the structure of reality. To discover or uncover these truths is to grasp and delineate (the relevant part of) a systematic, deeply explanatory account of reality. As Augustine puts it, these discoveries make it possible not only to defend the truth of the relevant Christian beliefs (by defending their consistency) but also to see 'the reason why the belief[s are] true'.

## Trinity

Augustine cautions that not all the truths Christians believe are equally accessible to human understanding. Some truths about the divine nature are beyond our ability to grasp fully by reason in this life. Indeed, all our thinking about the infinite supreme being must be inadequate to some extent. But even with regard to Christian doctrines where human reason must fall significantly short of full understanding, Augustine thinks there is point, profit, and an obligation to rational inquiry. His wide-ranging reflections in the treatise *On the Trinity* (Matthews and McKenna 2002) lead him to a detailed exploration of the logic of predication and to develop extremely interesting and fertile analogies of trinity in the nature of the human mind. Like his reflections on the nature of evil, these efforts result in deep, sophisticated, and original pieces of philosophical analysis and theorizing that represent significant contributions to the history of philosophy in their own right, quite apart from their contribution to Augustine's effort to understand the nature of the Trinity. Augustine explicitly denies that any of his results in *On the Trinity* constitute anything approaching a complete explanation of the divine Trinity; but he supposes nevertheless that there is clarification and insight—understanding of a kind and to a certain extent—to be gained in the process (*On the Trinity* 9.1.1 in Matthews and McKenna 2002).

# SEEKING WITH A PURE HEART

When Augustine claims that some propositions that deal with divine matters cannot be understood except by people who are pure of heart, he is expressing the view that some of these 'divine matters' can be understood only with God's help and that possession of a pure heart is a condition of God's providing the necessary help. Augustine supposes that the relevant sort of purity of heart is to be found in those who love God and have entered into the way of faith—that is, have become adherents of Christianity—and have made progress in the process of moral healing that the Christian life makes possible. As he puts it: '[purity of heart] is brought about by observing precepts that are accepted as rules for living rightly'.

Augustine suggests that belief is a precondition of understanding for divine matters generally. In his exhortations to seek understanding, he routinely quotes the prophet Isaiah in support of this position. In a passage near the beginning of *On Free Choice of the Will*, for example, Augustine assures Evodius that 'God will be with us and will help us understand what we have believed. For we can be assured that the Prophet's precept applies to us: "Unless you have believed, you will not understand" (Isaiah 7:9)' (1.2.4 in Williams 1993, my translation). (Augustine here quotes from the so-called Old Latin version of Isaiah. Later versions of Isaiah, including the Vulgate version produced by

Jerome during Augustine's lifetime, adopt a different reading of this text, a reading that does not support the point Augustine wishes to make here and elsewhere.)

As a general point about the conditions for understanding divine matters, Augustine's claim here seems too ambitious. It seems not only possible but entirely likely that, whether or not they are antecedently committed to the truth of Christianity, many readers of the various analyses and arguments Augustine's writings offer as instances of belief seeking understanding—including those found in *On Free Choice of the Will* and *On the Trinity*—will be able to grasp the results and thereby achieve the sort of understanding that Augustine himself and his Christian interlocutors and readers might achieve. So in theological inquiry generally, belief, and the moral transformation a life of Christian faith may promise, seem not in fact to be necessary conditions of the sort of understanding Augustine's discussions typically provide.

Augustine's view about the importance of purity of heart in the search for understanding may be more plausible, however, as applied to a special, or perhaps the limiting, case. Sometimes, as in the passage that follows, he appears to have in mind not (or not only) the understanding of some proposition or segment of Christian doctrine or reality but the comprehensive and unimpeded understanding to be had by those who reach the summit of contemplation and see God fact to face:

> So, then, as regards some things that pertain to the doctrine of salvation, things we cannot yet perceive by reason though we will be able to do so someday, let faith precede reason, and let the heart be cleansed by faith so as to receive and bear the light of great reason. This is indeed reasonable. And so the Prophet spoke with reason when he said 'Unless you believe, you will not understand'. In that passage he obviously distinguished those two and advised us to believe first so as to be able to understand what we believe.... If, then, we are faithful now, we will get to the way of faith. And, if we do not leave it, we will without doubt come not only to a great understanding of incorporeal and unchanging things, such as cannot be grasped by everyone in this life, but even to the summit of contemplation, which the Apostle calls 'face to face'.
>
> (*Letters* 120.1.3–4 in Teske 2002, tr. Kretzmann 1990)

## CONCLUSION

Augustine's identification of the category of rational or justified assent on less-than-certain grounds and his reflections on the nature and epistemic value of testimony break dramatic new ground in the history of epistemology. The application of his achievements to the realm of theological investigation provide theoretical foundations for generations of theologians from the later Middle Ages and Reformation to our own day. Moreover, contemporary continuing developments in the disciplines of both philosophy and theology demonstrate the enduring importance of the issues Augustine pioneered, from the explosion of interest in recent decades in the rationality of religious belief (Plantinga and Woltersorff 1983) to the epistemology of testimony (Coady 1992) and movements to define and defend a distinctively Christian philosophy and method for philosophical theology (Crip and Rea 2009; MacDonald 1996).

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## Suggested Reading

For Augustine himself, begin with Williams (1993). In the secondary literature, King and Ballantyne (2009), Kretzmann (1990), MacDonald (2012), Matthews (2005), Rist (1994), and Stump and Kretzmann (2013) are useful starting points. For general guides to Augustine's thought, see Brown (2000), Gilson (1967), and O'Donnell (2005).

# CHAPTER 23

# MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

### FREDERICK D. AQUINO

THE current landscape of virtue epistemology is broad and expansive. One way to map it is to draw a distinction between faculty-based and character-based approaches. The former conceives of the intellectual virtues as reliable belief-forming faculties such as memory, hearing, vision, introspection, and reason (see Sosa 1991, 2007, 2009; Greco 2000, 2010), while the latter thinks of them as character traits such as open-mindedness, thoroughness, attentiveness, honesty, courage, tenacity, and humility (see Code 1987; Montmarquet 1993; Zagzebski 1996). Along these lines, some claim that a focus on the intellectual virtues helps us to make progress in addressing traditional problems and questions in epistemology (e.g. the debate between internalism and externalism, the dispute between foundationalism and coherentism, the problem of scepticism, and the Gettier problem). Others see the intellectual virtues as an opportunity to broaden the horizons of epistemology and thus carve out new areas of investigation. Some of these areas include giving attention to the nature and structure of the intellectual virtues, clarifying their particular role in the cognitive life, explaining how they contribute to 'personal intellectual worth', spelling out their bearing on the social and political aspects of epistemic conduct, and showing how they create space for pursuing epistemic goods (see Kvanvig 1992; Baehr 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015; Fricker 2007; and Roberts and Wood 2007).

This landscape is ripe with possibilities for theological engagement and appropriation. Constructively speaking, Maximus the Confessor (580–662 CE) is a fitting example of the kind of intersection that I have in mind here. In terms of mapping the cognitive economy of the spiritual life, he draws attention to virtuous and contemplative practices that enable the intellect to attain its proper end (divine likeness) and acquire the related epistemic goods. However, my reading of Maximus in this chapter will focus more on the role that the virtues (especially ascetic character traits) play in the cognitive economy of the spiritual life than on whether they contribute significantly to, supplant, or complement traditional concerns in epistemology.

In what follows, I hope to show how the virtues, for Maximus, contribute to the formation of a deep and abiding desire for the relevant epistemic goods (e.g.

contemplation of God in and through nature, illumination of divine truths, wisdom, and perceptual knowledge of God) as well as playing a supportive role in the pursuit of them. Accordingly, I structure this chapter in the following way. First, I will unpack Maximus's account of the three philosophical stages of the spiritual life. Second, I will draw attention to his understanding of the relationship between the virtues and the relevant epistemic goods. Third, I will show that although there is a clear distinction between *praktike* (ascetic formation, practice of the virtues) and *theoria* (e.g. natural contemplation), they are inextricably linked concerning the spiritual life and the pursuit of the related epistemic goods. Fourth, I will clarify how the virtue of love in particular fosters within the self a positive orientation (a praiseworthy desire over competing desires) for the relevant epistemic goods. Finally, I will offer briefly some concluding reflections concerning Maximus's pairing of virtue and knowledge and identify a few areas of inquiry that warrant further work and development.

## The Philosophical Stages of the Spiritual Life

Undergirding Maximus's conception of the spiritual life is a vision of how one ought to be formed—philosophically as well as morally, liturgically, and theologically—and of the path that enables one to make progress towards fulfilling the ultimate end of human existence—divine likeness. Even so, this section focuses on Maximus's understanding of what the philosophical pursuit of divine wisdom entails. In this respect, he frames the pursuit of the relevant epistemic goods in terms of three philosophical stages of the spiritual life: (1) practical (or ascetic) philosophy (*praktike philosophia*), (2) natural philosophy (*physike philosophia*), and (3) theological philosophy (*theologia philosophia* or simply *theologia*; see *Th.oec.* 2.94, 96 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 162–3; *Amb.Io.*10.1129A, 20.1241C, 21.1245D in Constas 2014a: 197, 419, 429; *Amb.Io.* 37.1293B, 1296B in Constas 2014b: 79, 83; *QD* 58 in Prassas 2010: 75). Fundamental to this threefold philosophical approach is the formation of a 'singularly insatiable desire for deifying knowledge' that outweighs and redirects competing desires (*Sec.ep.* prol. 2 in Lollar 2009: 78; on the connection between positive orientation and the acquisition of epistemic goods, see Baehr 2011: esp. Ch. 6). The epistemological focus here is not only on how these stages factor in the cultivation of a 'state of mind' (or a positive orientation) that is 'receptive to the mystical knowledge of God' but also on how they enable one to make progress towards achieving this end (*Amb.Io.* prol.1064A, 7.1076C in Constas 2014a: 63, 91).

The first stage involves the cultivation of the virtues in which the self is purified from false notions (or 'impassioned images') and forms a praiseworthy desire (or a 'holy passion') for God that leads to contemplation (*Amb.Io.* 6.1068C, 10.1161C, 13.1209B, 20.1241C in Constas 2014a: 73, 259, 351, 419; *Amb.Io.* 51.1369D–1372A in Constas 2014b: 231–33;

*Car*. 2.26, *Th.oec*. 1.37 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 69, 122). For example, a fundamental goal of *praktike* is the virtuous state of dispassion (*apatheia*). As a peaceful and stable state of mind, dispassion frees up the self to contemplate divine matters. The mind is ready to journey 'straight ahead to the contemplation of created things' and then fly freely to the 'knowledge of heavenly things'. As a result, the self is able to 'see things rightly' and respond only to those things that are true, good, and beautiful (*Car*. 1.85, 86, 2.97 in Berthold 1985: 45, 61; see also *Car*. 1.36, 91, 93, 2.25, 34: 39, 45, 50; on the connection between virtue and perception in Maximus, see Aquino 2012b).

The second stage is contemplation of God in and through nature. The self here acquires understanding (or illumination) of the inner principles of the natural order (including the words of scripture) and thus becomes more advanced in spiritually perceiving the 'harmonious wisdom' in created realities (*Car*. 3.24 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 86; *Amb.Io.* 10.1128C in Constas 2014a: 193–95; *Amb.Io.* 71.1413C–D in Const. 2014b: 325). Although the first and second stages form an integral relationship in the spiritual life, direct perceptual knowledge of God is the end to which the self is directed. It is in the third stage that the self receives direct perceptual knowledge of (participation in the energies of) the triune God. In this state, the self is 'granted the grace of theology when, carried on wings of love beyond these two former stages, it is taken up into God and with the help of the Holy Spirit discerns—as far as this is possible for the human intellect—the qualities of God' (*Car*. 2.26 in in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 69).

Maximus's account of the spiritual life (especially in terms of the first and second stages) envisions a complementary relationship between human cognitive activity and the work of divine grace. Redirecting the intellect to its proper end, in other words, does not necessitate shutting down the natural faculties in order to activate the spiritual, nor does it require the activity of a secret sense (or a supplementary intellect to our own mind). Instead, the desire for acquiring epistemic goods such as illumination, contemplation, and wisdom calls for genuine human receptivity and cognitive activity.

> We are not permitted to say that grace alone brings about, in the saints, insight into the divine mysteries without any contribution from their natural capacity to receive knowledge.... The point is that the grace of the Holy Spirit does not bring about wisdom in the saints without the receptivity of their intelligence, does not give knowledge without their ability to grasp the Word, does not give faith without the stability of mind and the confident readiness to face the still-unrevealed future in hope .... For the grace of the Holy Spirit never destroys the capabilities of nature. Just the opposite: it makes nature, which has been weakened by unnatural habit, mature and strong enough once again to function in a natural way and leads it upward toward insight into the divine. For what the Holy Spirit is trying to accomplish in us is a true knowledge of things .... For as the Logos accomplished divine works in the flesh, but not without the cooperation of a body animated by a rational soul, so the Holy Spirit accomplishes in the Saints the ability to understand mysteries, but not without the exercise of their natural abilities or without their seeking and careful searching for knowledge.
>
> (*Q.Thal.* 59.604D-–608C in Balthasar 2003: 72–3;
> see also *Th.oec.* 2.83 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 158)

With this in mind, an important feature of the spiritual life involves the reconstitution of the intellect in a fuller sense than its original created state, especially since humans 'exist first in potential, and only later in actuality' (*Amb.* 7.1081A, in Constas 2014a: 101). The aim here is to purify, illumine, and perfect the intellect in accordance with its proper end. Along these lines, pursuing God calls for a natural process of formation and development. In this respect, God infuses within the intellect an ever-growing desire for union with God, from whom it had its origin, by whom it is activated, and towards whom it ascends by means of its natural cognitive powers. A desire of this sort is coupled with the employment of the relevant cognitive powers so that we might be able to 'know the ways by which this longing might be satisfied' (*Amb.Io*. 48.1361A–B in Constas 2014b: 213; see also *Car*. 3:24–5, 64 in Berthold 1985: 64).

Satisfying our longing for divine likeness (and acquiring the related epistemic goods towards this end) requires the proper functioning of our cognitive powers in the right environment. In this regard, God has given us 'a mode by which we could make proper use of our natural powers' (*Amb.Io*. 7.1097C in Constas 2014a: 133; see also *Amb.Io*. 10.1116C: 169). Conversely, the propensity to act in a way that is 'contrary to nature' results in the misuse of these powers. In fact, Maximus frames the redirection of the self in terms of a distinction between the natural and the unnatural motion of the self. In terms of the former, he understands motion as a 'natural power' (or 'passion') that is 'impelled towards its proper end'. In this sense, 'passion' plays a positive role in forming the right state of mind, in the proper function of our cognitive powers, and in moving the intellect towards its 'proper end'. Negatively speaking, passion is an impulse that digresses and deviates from the natural motion of the intellect and thereby goes astray 'from the motion that naturally carries it along to God' (*Amb.Io*. 7.1072B; 10.112A–B in Constas 2014a: 81, 159; on the transformation of the passions in Maximus, see, e.g. *Amb.Io*. 6 and Blowers 1996, 2011, 2013).

Although the stages of the spiritual life are inextricably related to one another, Maximus nevertheless explains the difference between the cognitive and volitional activities of the self in this world and the future state of deification in which God alone will transform humanity:

> Existing here and now, we arrive at the *end of the ages* as active agents and reach the end of the exertion of our power and activity. But in the ages to come we shall undergo by grace the transformation unto deification and no longer be active but passive; and for this reason we shall not cease from being deified. At that point our passion will be supernatural, and there will be no principle restrictive of the divine activity in infinitely deifying those who are passive to it. For we are active agents insofar as we have operative, by nature, a rational faculty for performing the virtues, and also a spiritual faculty, unlimited in its potential, capable of receiving all knowledge, capable of transcending the nature of all created beings and known things and even of leaving the 'ages' of time behind it. But when in the future we are rendered passive (in deification), and have fully transcended the principles of beings created out of nothing, we will unwittingly enter into the true Cause of existent beings and terminate our proper faculties along with everything in our nature that has reached completion. We shall become that which in no way results from our natural ability, since our human nature has no faculty for grasping what transcends nature.
>
> (*Q.Thal*. 22.141 in Wilken and Blowers: 2003: 117f., emphasis in original)

The natural motion of the self accordingly includes the proper employment of our cognitive faculties, but the future state of deification is a graced (or unconditioned) mode of (experiential) knowledge; it 'finds no faculty or capacity of any sort within nature that could receive it'. That is, it does not take place 'in accordance with the receptive capacity of nature' (*Amb.Io*. 20.1237B in Constas 2014a: 409). Although deification is a future state that is outside the bounds of our nature, it is nevertheless an 'eternal perfection of the active faculties of human nature'. The 'true dialectic' here is that of continuity with creation (e.g. practising the virtues is in accordance with the natural movement of the intellect) and the transcendence of the created order. Accordingly, the future state of deification is the fulfilment and perfection of antecedent modes of knowledge (e.g. theological truths deduced from causes in *physike philosophia*). In other words, the self's cognitive and volitional activities have been 'primed for communion with God' (Blowers 1997: 262).

The spiritual life, then, is not simply a return to a pristine world or to a pre-fallen state, nor is it merely the basic functioning of belief-forming faculties such as memory, sense perception, introspection, and so on. These faculties need to be developed and trained, especially with the aim of achieving the goal of divine likeness. Sharpening our cognitive powers enables the self to perceive, discern, and navigate aptly the contours of the spiritual life. 'A pure intellect sees things correctly. A trained intelligence puts them in order' (*Car*. 2.97 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 82). To put it in contemporary terms, the 'mature functioning of the epistemic agent depends on and makes use of the faculties, but the dispositions that are needed for high-level functioning are not the faculties alone, but the epistemic skills and virtues that are built on them' (Roberts and Wood 2007: 111; on the connection with Maximus, see Blowers 1996: 83f.). The self through the cultivation of deiform character traits and contemplative practices seeks to make progress towards the goal of divine likeness.

The point here is that the self must be volitionally open and formed through virtuous and contemplative practices in order to share in the divine life. As we have seen, the 'conceptually loaded' practices in the first and second stages of the spiritual life aid the self in purging misguided desires, in perceiving correctly wisdom in nature, and in making progress towards divine likeness (for a helpful discussion of the relationship between conceptually loaded practices and perception, see Greco 2000: esp. Ch. 9). Yet, Maximus distinguishes the penultimate goal of these stages (relative or rational knowledge) from the greater epistemic good, namely direct perceptual knowledge of God:

> The scriptural Word knows of two kinds of knowledge of divine things. On the one hand, there is relative knowledge, rooted only in reason and ideas, and lacking in the kind of experiential perception of what one knows through active engagement; such relative knowledge is what we use to order our affairs in our present life. On the other hand, there is truly authentic knowledge, gained only by actual experience, apart from reason and ideas, which provides a total perception of the known object through a participation … by grace…. By 'rational knowledge of God' I mean the use of the analogy of created beings in the intellectual contemplation of God; by 'perception' I mean the experience, through participation, of the supernatural goods.
>
> (*Q.Thal*. 60.77 in Wilken and Blowers 2003: 126)

The eschatological gift of participation in the life of God (third stage) is the consummation of volitional and cognitive activities in the first and second stages of the spiritual life. One can obtain truths about God from the natural world but they fall short of the kind of direct experience (*peira*) or immediate perception (*aisthesis*) of God that Maximus describes in the third stage of the spiritual life (*theologia*). In other words, a person may come to believe or know (through deductive, inductive, or abductive reasoning) that God exists without deriving this knowledge from an actual encounter with God. Even so, rational knowledge of this sort 'can motivate our desire for the participative knowledge acquired by active engagement' (*Q.Thal*. 60.77 in Wilken and Blowers 2003: 126). Its overall purpose is to 'awake in us a desire for mystical participation; but it is also designed to purify the soul in a positive way and prepare it for the transcendental experience' (Balthasar 2003: 288).

## VIRTUE AND EPISTEMIC GOODS

By including practical philosophy (*praktike*) as one of the philosophical stages, Maximus rejects the claim (or the misreading of Gregory the Theologian's Oration 21) that 'divine philosophy' (or the epistemic pursuit of God) happens primarily (if not only) through 'reason' (*logos*) and 'contemplation' (*theoria*) alone without engaging in (or giving little attention to) the process of ascetic formation (see *Amb.Io.*10.1108A in Constas 2014a: 151).[1] Alternatively, he argues that *praktike* plays an important role in forming a positive orientation towards as well as supporting the diligent quest for the relevant epistemic goods (see *Th.oec.* 1.20 in Berthold 1985: 132). The stronger claim is that 'whoever desires to seize the knowledge of God without engaging in action is struggling in vain' (*QD* 147.7–8 in Prassas 2010: 117). As we will see, Maximus envisions a synthetic unity (without confusion) between *praktike* and *theoria. Praktike* makes rigorous demands on the self that require the possession of virtues such as humility, self-control, dispassion, prudence, and love. These traits are not optional in terms of the self's desire to pursue the relevant epistemic goods. Moreover, *praktike* has a cognitive dimension, especially since its pursuits are 'conjoined with reason' and its sound judgements are 'contained in contemplation' (*Amb.Io*. 10.1108A in Constas 2014a: 151). As a result, Maximus argues that ascetic formation (e.g. the struggle involved in cultivating and embodying virtuous dispositions) is a precondition for rendering philosophically honed judgements, for perceiving correctly the divine in and through nature, and for participating in the life of God.

The vices bring about a state of disintegration in which the self misuses its cognitive powers (e.g. self-love; Maximus calls it 'the mother of all passions'; see *Ep*. 2.397C in Louth 1996: 85). More importantly, they impede the pursuit of the relevant epistemic goods. As a result, the self fails to decipher the truth indicators of God's presence.

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[1] Portions of this section and the next draw from and develop some of the material in Aquino 2013.

Conversely, those who engage in divine philosophy with a pure heart 'derive the greatest gain from the knowledge it contains. For their will and purpose no longer change with circumstances, but readily and with firm assurance they undertake all that conforms to the standard of holiness' (*Th.oec.* 1.86 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 133). Accordingly, the virtues factor prominently in the reintegration of the self and its well-being. They clear away volitional and intellectual obstacles and thereby create space for pursuing the relevant epistemic goods (see *Amb. Io*. 42.1392A in Constas 2014b: 149). More specifically, the virtues play an indispensable role in employing the faculties rightly, in redirecting intellectual distractions, in fostering stable dispositions, and in enabling the self to 'return to its senses'. Maximus, for example, says that without the virtues of dispassion and humility, 'no one will see the Lord' (*Car*. 2.64, 4.58 in Berthold 1985: 56, 81). A person regulated by the virtues will not be distracted by false representations or fantasies, but will be positively oriented towards what is true, beautiful, and good.

The point here seems to be that the virtues have an epistemic payoff insofar as they foster volitional openness and facilitate (or perhaps contribute to) the process of pursuing epistemic goods. A 'careless' mind quickly assents to or gets caught up in its own 'passionate imaginings and impulses', while the 'virtuous mind' combats such intellectual and affective distractions (*Car*. 2.56 in Berthold 1985: 55). With this connection between virtue and epistemic goods in mind, a very important part of the spiritual life requires rectifying misguided desires and cultivating a praiseworthy desire for knowledge of God (*Car*. 2.56 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 75).

Maximus, then, sees the role of the virtues as crucial for creating space to pursue epistemic goods. Along these lines, the self must take up reliable belief-forming processes and practices. In addition, the goal of moving towards the ultimate end of human existence (eternal well-being) requires the 'dignity, nature, and character of those who practice virtue and who are moved towards divine knowledge' (*Th.oec*. 2.31 in Berthold 1985: 154). That is, the virtues foster epistemic stability and facilitate the right manner of seeking knowledge of God, discernment of divine truths, wisdom, and so on. Those who have 'rightly accomplished the way of the virtues' are both led 'on to knowledge' and shown the 'brilliant treasures of wisdom' (*Th.Oec*. 2.69, in Berthold 1985: 162). In other words, these epistemic goods are there for those who are volitionally open and cognitively attuned to the reality of God's presence. So, the process of cultivating and embodying virtuous dispositions purifies one from misguided or false notions, enables one to advance in knowledge of God, and opens up the possibility of receiving divine wisdom.

Accordingly, the virtues are rationally tempered insofar as they are embedded in the very nature of things (in accordance with the logos) and manifest the very presence of God. Those who successfully form a virtuous habit of mind and become 'rich in knowledge' discern and assess 'everything according to right reason' (*Car*. 1.92 in Berthold 1985: 45). However, acquiring right reasoning of this sort rarely happens in isolation. Rather, it comes by learning from virtuous exemplars who 'reveal within themselves the truth which till then had been concealed' (*Amb.Io*. 8.1104D–1105A in Constas 2014a: 147).

## SYNTHESIS WITHOUT CONFUSION

As we have seen, a truly robust account of the pursuit of the relevant epistemic goods includes both practical (*praktike*) and contemplative (*theoria*) aspects of deiform existence. The self must be properly oriented (volitionally open) in order to pursue the relevant epistemic goods. However, the work of contemplative practices is largely focused on and responsible for successful acquisition of them. Although there is a clear distinction between the practical and contemplative components, they are inextricably connected in terms of the self's move towards its proper end and the related epistemic goods. Along these lines, Maximus claims that in both the rational activity of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and the contemplative activity of wisdom (*sophia*) 'consists the true science [*episteme*] of divine and human matters, the truly secure knowledge and term of all divine wisdom'. The contemplative aspect, when properly regulated and supported by *praktike*, is positively oriented towards the relevant epistemic goods and moves 'unswervingly towards God' (*Myst.* 5 in Berthold 1985: 190–1).

In the *Mystagogia*, for instance, Maximus lists five pairings of the practical and contemplative aspects of the spiritual life: (1) mind and reason, (2) wisdom and prudence, (3) contemplation and action, (4) knowledge and virtue, and (5) enduring knowledge and faith. Each pairing retains (without confusion) the practical and contemplative ends of deiform existence. These aspects of the spiritual life 'are unified in their one object, though they may tend toward it under different aspects' (Sherwood 1955: 98). For example, Maximus thinks that the activity of the mind (*nous*) is directed towards the acquisition of divine knowledge, truth, and wisdom, and the activity of reason (*logos*) is directed towards the cultivation of virtue, the active pursuit of goodness, and the formation of apt judgements about concrete matters.

Notwithstanding their distinctive aims, the goal is to 'unite' and 'weave' these aspects of deiform existence into each other: 'reason with mind, prudence with wisdom, action with contemplation, virtue with knowledge, faith with enduring knowledge'. What results is the formation of a 'rational mind, a prudent wisdom, an active contemplation, a virtuous knowledge, and along with them an enduring knowledge which is both very faithful and unchangeable' (*Myst.* 5 in Berthold 1985: 193). The relationship between virtue and knowledge, for example, entails a synthetic unity without confusion or violation of their distinctive aims. A unity of this sort not only indicates that virtue and knowledge are both 'important, and that one cannot be isolated from the other, or substituted for the other. It also implies that they support each other in their functions, and thus condition the perfection of each other' (Thunberg 1995: 341; see also Balthasar 2003: 331–9).

Maximus envisions, then, a synthetic unity that does not confuse the particular aims of *praktike* and *theoria*, but neither does he separate them strictly into independent and unrelated realms. Rather, when virtuous and contemplative practices 'mutually cohere in one another', the self's thoughts are sanctified (*Q.Thal.* 58.64–9 in Cooper 2005: 63; *Th.oec.* 2.32 in Berthold 1985: 154). However, *praktike* is not sufficient in and of itself for acquiring the relevant epistemic goods (e.g. self-control or humility do not necessarily lead to the successful acquisition of knowledge). Rather, *theoria* is largely directed towards these goods. Yet, the self will not flourish in its contemplative pursuits without properly formed virtuous dispositions and practices, and so *theoria*, in this sense, is supported and facilitated by *praktike*. In the end, Maximus claims that *praktike* and *theoria* are integrated (though not confused), but they are also hierarchically ordered in that the former frees (makes space for) the latter to pursue the relevant epistemic goods.

## Love as Positive Epistemic Orientation

As we have seen, the virtues play an important role in refining and perfecting the right use of the faculties, and thereby redirecting them to their proper end. When the self is free from intellectual and affective digressions, a positive orientation is crucial to the pursuit of epistemic goods (e.g. true rather than false beliefs; illumination of the spiritual principles in the natural world; perceptual knowledge of God). The self's rational activity should be positively oriented towards God, and so the cognitive and the volitional should be coupled so as to foster a praiseworthy desire for God. The desire for knowledge of God needs to win over competing desires. The self must learn to operate in 'the right way' and 'transfer its whole longing onto God' (*Car*. 3.47–8, 72 in Berthold 1985: 67, 71). In so doing, the faculties will be rightly disposed, prepared, and oriented in such a way that the self will make progress in its pursuit of the epistemic goods.

In this regard, the virtue of love provides a positive orientation towards the pursuit of the relevant epistemic goods. Though it is clearly distinguished from these goods, love is deeply linked with forming a praiseworthy desire for knowledge of God, the illumination of divine truths, and so on. With this distinction in mind, love serves perhaps as a facilitating virtue insofar as it disposes the intellect to prefer knowledge of God to all other things and 'constantly prepares it to advance in knowledge' (on the notion of a facilitating virtue, see Baehr 2011: 157; as a meta-virtue or as the culmination of the virtues in *praktike*, dispassion also seems to function as a facilitating virtue insofar as it creates the kind of stability that is relevant for pursuing the desiderata of contemplation). In fact, the self's desire to pursue epistemic goods is 'born of' and 'activated by love' (*Car*. 1.1, 4, 9, 47; 4.60 in Berthold 1985: 36, 40, 82).

So, love is not concerned merely with the moral formation of the self, and nor is it simply the finished product of the first stage (*praktike*) of the spiritual life, especially since it is conducive to and supportive of the pursuit of the relevant epistemic goods. It is also linked with the quest for knowledge of God and accordingly carries intellectual activity towards communion with God. In this respect, Maximus 'does not wish to establish an order of superiority as between love and knowledge, since love in a wide sense not only involves a preference for the knowledge of God to anything else, but also carries [the self] in all [its] intellectual activity to full communion with God' (Thunberg 1995: 286; see also Sherwood 1955: 97–9).

As a 'holy state' (or a 'blessed passion'), love 'binds the intellect to spiritual contemplation', disposes it to prefer knowledge of God (e.g. mystical knowledge of God) to all other things, and enables it to pursue 'such knowledge ardently and ceaselessly' (*Car*. 1.1, 4; 3.67 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 53, 93). With this in mind, deifying illumination (or 'the light of spiritual knowledge') is 'engendered by love for God' (*Car*. 1.9 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 54). 'Just as the thought of fire does not warm the body, so faith without love does not actualize the light of spiritual knowledge in the soul.' Or 'just as the light of the sun attracts a healthy eye, so through love knowledge of God naturally draws to itself the pure intellect' (*Car.* 1.31–2 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 56). Understood in this way, love for and knowledge of God are integrally related to the intellectual formation of the agent of deification.

Along these lines, a virtuously formed mind, sustained by self-control and moved by love, withholds itself from and rectifies 'impassioned fantasies and impulses' (*Car*. 2.56 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 75). In fostering epistemic stability of this sort, the power of love liberates the intellect from vices (e.g. arrogance), 'equips it to advance in knowledge', and thus enables the deiform self to grow in its capacity to perceive divine mysteries (*Car*. 4.60, 72 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 107, 109). Progress here requires aligning the quest for knowledge of God with evaluative qualities precisely because the goal of being immersed in the divine life presupposes maturation of the person. More exactly, the ultimate end is 'the transposition and transmutation of those found worthy into a state of deification' in which they will become directly acquainted with and participate in 'God's deifying energy' (*Th.oec*. 1.55–60 in Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1981: 125f.).

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Maximus spells out the contours of the spiritual life more in diachronic than in synchronic terms. The self takes up virtuous and contemplative practices over time, and in so doing acquires an appetite for knowledge of God, learns to contemplate God in and through nature, and participates in what is beautiful, true, and good. Presupposed here is an ascetic-oriented struggle in which the self strives through these practices to make progress towards the goal of divine likeness. The point is not to suggest that all domains of inquiry need to follow the same process. Rather, the aim here is to hone in on the conditions under which humans learn to realize the goal of divine likeness.

We have also seen that Maximus envisions a synthetic unity of *praktike* and *theoria* in which the virtues contribute to the redirection of misguided desires, the formation of a positive orientation, the right employment of the faculties, and the pursuit of the relevant epistemic goods. A unity of this sort does not sanction a complete separation of the practical and the contemplative, nor does it blur the distinction between the epistemic and the moral. Nevertheless, Maximus often couples virtue and knowledge (Constas, 2014a: 478 n. 3, says that this pairing is central to Maximus's thought on the

spiritual life; see also e.g. *Amb.Io*. 10.1108D–1109A, 10.1120B, 1121B, 1140B in Constas 2014a: 155; 177, 181, 215; *Amb.Io*. 37.1292B, 1297B, 48.1364C, 51.1371A, 67.1397C: 75, 87, 217–19, 232, 291; *Car*. 1.92, 2.25 in Berthold 1985: 45, 50; *Th.oec*. 1.20, 35, 78, 2.32–3, 40, 98, 100 in Berthold 1985: 132, 135, 142, 154, 156, 169–70). He combines virtue and knowledge on two fronts. Sometimes he frames this combination in soteriological terms: 'Whoever longs for salvation devotes [themselves] to a life of practice or contemplation—for without virtue and knowledge no one has ever been able to attain salvation' (*Amb.Io*. 6.1065D in Constas 2014a: 71). Other times he descibes it in epistemological terms: '… where there is "purification" of the soul by the virtues, there is also "illumination" by knowledge …. This illumination raises up the soul to the understanding of God, and unites its desire with the ultimate object of its desire, which is God' (*Amb.Io*. 40.1304A in Constas 2014b: 99; see also *Myst*. 5 in Berthold 1985: 190–5).

However, the epistemological dimension here needs greater clarification. One area of enquiry comes to mind. As noted, some contemporary epistemologists have given accounts of the nature and structure of intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness, love of knowledge, humility, courage, generosity, autonomy, firmness, and practical wisdom (e.g. Baehr 2011; Roberts and Wood 2007). A comparable area of investigation would involve categorizing the nature, structure, and role of each ascetic virtue and how (or whether) each contributes to or facilitates the cognitive life of deiform existence. The wide-ranging nature of recent work in epistemology creates space for such an exploration (see Alston 2005; Kvanvig 2005; Riggs 2008). Accordingly, the time is ripe for putting patristic writers such as Maximus in conversation with recent developments in virtue epistemology and with the broader landscape of epistemology. As this chapter has shown, the epistemology of theology is deeply suited to explore such opportunities (see Abraham 1998 and Aquino 2012a).

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# CHAPTER 24

# SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

### WILLIAM J. ABRAHAM

The life and work of Symeon (949–1022 CE) presents multiple challenges for the contemporary student of epistemology. His proposals taken in the round are multifaceted in nature so that he can be read in terms of a great spiritual director, a hardy monastic reformer, an insightful theologian of the Holy Spirit, a creative exegete of scripture, a remarkable poet, and a spirited critic of ecclesial life. He would not automatically show up on a list devoted to naming significant contributors to the epistemology of theology. Yet a cursory reading of his corpus makes clear that he readily advances a network of important epistemological claims that are worthy of sustained attention. Moreover, his status as a great teacher of the church—one of the three great canonical teachers recognized in the East—suggests that it would be a serious mistake to ignore what he might have to offer. Beyond that, while we shall not have space to document the sources that feed into his endeavours, he clearly brings into focus central claims about knowledge of God that have deep roots in the scriptures and in his theological forbears in the East. The parallels in the West, for example in the epistemological ruminations of John Wesley, are also fascinating and worthy of future exploration (Abraham 2010). So Symeon stands at a crossroads for a significant but neglected trajectory of theological reflection that deserves our attention. I shall begin with a brief account of his life and then proceed to unpack the salient epistemological materials that are readily discernible in his writings.

## SYMEON'S LIFE

Symeon was brought up in an aristocratic and conventional Christian family, and made his way into the civil service at Constantinople, eventually dropping out of that world because of its demands and temptations. As a teenager, under the care of a lay monk who was on the lookout for the potential challenges of adolescents, he had a deep encounter with God that clearly changed his life. Despite this he had a disastrous spiritual fall that took him outside the church for several years. Brought back into the fold by his mentor, he joined his monastic community as a novice. Given his youthful and aggressive zeal, he ran into trouble with his superiors and was moved to another monastery where, after ordination to the priesthood, he became the leader and thus spiritual director of those under his care. This episode had all the hallmarks of a young man in a hurry who had more zeal than knowledge. In time his monks grew restless and made the mistake of staging a revolt that cost them dearly and almost destroyed their monastic community. Symeon survived this unhappy incident and soldiered on.

He was not, however, out of trouble, for a determined superior challenged him on both theological and liturgical grounds. For a time, he was able to hold his own in that his opponent was no match for him theologically (Symeon 2010: 141–57). In the end, however, he was severely reprimanded by the established leaders of the church and packed off to ecclesial exile in a dilapidated monastery far from the great centres of power. Undeterred, he continued his calling as a leader, rebuilt the monastery both physically and numerically, and settled into a lifetime of teaching and writing. Two years later, the authorities had a change of mind and gave him a clean bill of health. In order to repair the damage done to him, he was offered ecclesial preferment but turned it down. He was morally certain that his vocation lay in his current work, and stayed put. Given this stormy history, his attack on the establishment of his day, his rhetorically contrived references to his own experiences of God, and his attack on standard accounts of the historic episcopate, it is nothing short of astonishing that he was put in the same circle as John the Divine, the writer of the fourth Gospel, and Gregory of Nazianzus, as a canonical Teacher of the Church. Despite such an imprimatur, his work has been quietly buried at various times, only to surface again and again as a source of renewal and correction. We are currently in the midst of a revival of interest in his work and are fortunate to have in hand splendid editions of it available.

## Epistemological Materials

Symeon lived all of his spiritual and theological life inside the horizon of his ecclesial community. He therefore assumed a heritage that had already assimilated the theological materials and practices of his community. Given that the patristic and Eastern tradition did not canonize any particular epistemology of theology but lived with diversity in this arena, it is not easy to determine what epistemological norms were tacitly embedded in his work. For the present we can assume that he took for granted the place, say, of scripture and tradition, in securing the deep content of his theology. More specifically, we can assume that divine inspiration and special divine revelation were tacitly in place. These did not, however, receive the kind of attention that they would later garner in the West due to the internal and external challenges that the latter had to face. Even to this day, the East operates more in terms of a hit-and-run exercise than in terms of serious systematic reflection. His primary interest lay in entering into the spiritual world articulated in the great faith of the church rather than in engaging in second-order epistemic work for its own sake. Yet because of the bold claims he made in this domain, it was not enough merely to proclaim dogmatically what he was teaching; he had to persuade his hearers, readers, and critics. Thus he could not avoid entering into second-order debates about how he secured the theological claims that won him his followers and scandalized his opponents.

Even then, crucial claims about knowledge enter into his articulation of what constitutes true faith and true Christianity. As a point of entry, consider the following prototypes of Christian commitment. Pious Paul is a deeply knowledgeable theologian. He knows huge parts of the Bible by heart, some of it in the original languages. He has gained an international reputation as a champion of orthodoxy and a brilliant apologist who deploys a precisionist sensibility to defend the great truths of the faith against its critics. He is an expert exegete who can synthesize a network of texts to show how the doctrines, say, of inspiration, incarnation, and Trinity can be derived from scripture, either by direct reference from the texts of scripture or by sound and valid inference from them. He knows the cognitive content of the faith and does the best he can to live up to its demands and significance in his personal, ecclesial, and social life. As a result he is seen as a great champion of the faith, is showered by honorary degrees from learned institutions, garners significant fees in debates with atheists, and is looked upon with awe by Christian believers across the world who follow him on Youtube.

Consider also his beloved cousin Pauline. She is a devout believer who shares much of what her cousin Paul believes about scripture, incarnation, and Trinity. However, she finds his defence of the faith highly intellectual and ethereal. For her part, she trusts the church and its official teachers to get things right because God gives them the necessary assistance to this effect. So she stands staunchly by her church's teaching about baptismal regeneration, transubstantiation, purgatory, and the beatific vision. She relies on the practices of the church and on her ordained agents to possess the necessary supernatural power to secure and mediate the relevant forms of truth and grace that take her from the cradle to the grave. She is an upright member of her local ecclesial community, wholeheartedly participating in its worship and its ministries. For her, faith entails believing in what the church teaches and doing what it tells her to do.

Viewed from an epistemic point of view the crucial feature of both Paul and Pauline is that faith is a matter of assent to true belief, secured either directly by standard intellectual and scholarly practices or indirectly by supernaturally authorized organs and mechanisms, coupled with sincere efforts to live out the faith by appropriately delivered divine grace and assistance. The epistemic orientation focuses on sincere assent to relatively clear and precise theological propositions secured by relevant explicit argument, or on experts who can provide relevant explicit argument.

These portraits, whatever salience they may have as depictions of popular paradigms of true Christians, are simply a heuristic device to bring out the most important feature of Symeon's vision of Christianity. What they lack is intimate, personal knowledge of God for oneself. We might say that for Symeon Christianity is first and foremost a transformative experience of the divine, beginning in this life in response to the Gospel and scripture, mediated in the practices of the church, and brought to a fitting climax in the world to come. The epistemic corollary involves a particular conception of theological discourse, a vision of epistemic failure and struggle, and a grounding of theological claims in transformative perception of the divine as depicted in scripture and in the great dogmas of the canonical faith of the church. His epistemic orientation thus focuses on our epistemic faculties or capacities, their repair through divine action and grace, and their success in securing accurate depictions of the triune God.

Theologically speaking, Symeon has his own unique way of unpacking the great narrative of creation, fall, and redemption. Within this he embraces the doctrines of, say, the incarnation and Trinity with enthusiasm. Indeed what strikes him about these doctrines is that when explored with care they involve initiation into a whole new world of thought and action that naturally engenders wonder, ecstasy, inexpressible joy, and transformation. His favoured way of capturing this insight can be expressed in terms of faith, hope, and love. Faith is not just assent to theological propositions but a living trust that takes one into a journey from initial doubt to deep assurance. Hope is not just a desired anticipation of great things to come beyond the grave but an already partial but realized experience of future existence in heaven with Christ and the saints. Love, the climax and very heart of Christianity, is not just a moral commitment to live a life of faithfulness to God and neighbour as taught by the Son of God but a profound experience of the love of God through the Holy Spirit that overcomes here and now in a radical way the effects of ancestral sin and the wayward effects of disordered passion. Both his *Discourses* and his *On the Mystical Life: the Ethical Discourses* make this Pauline triad the theological foundation of his vision of Christianity. Without the living embodiment of faith, hope, and love, what we have is intellectual assent to dogma, sincere efforts to do good, and consistent but external trust in the rituals and practices of the church. All these are important but they only touch the hem of the church's garments. Getting beyond these pious forms of faith requires coming to terms with the deep content and epistemic implications of dogma, moral struggle, and ecclesial practice.

On the epistemic front, Symeon begins with a description of our initial epistemic predicament. We live in a fallen world where the environment is already subject to demonic action that seeks us out and draws us away from our divine origin and from true happiness. Furthermore, we inherit the effects of ancestral sin, an inheritance that tilts us in the wrong direction intellectually, morally, and spiritually. These two untoward factors are accompanied by our disordered desires that inhibit our capacity to perceive our true destiny as designed by God and that prevent us from recognizing the mystery of divine descent in the incarnation to restore us to our proper vocation. We are essentially spiritually blind and dead. Without divine mercy and assistance, we could never be made whole. While divine assistance does not obliterate our genuinely free action in response to God, we are in no position to claim any merit for our initial standing before God in forgiveness and justification. These are entirely gratuitous. The same logic applies to the wealth of divine assistance that accompanies us in the life of faith, hope, and love.

What we have on display here is an initial vision of the cognitive effects of ancestral and present sin. Those effects pertain to failure to recognize our current condition, and to opposition, if not hostility, to the divine revelation given by prophets, apostles, and the very Son of God, presented to us in the scriptures and the tradition of the church, both of which are inspired by God. We can express this as a failure on two fronts. First, it is a failure in exercising our cognitive capacities, a failure in our God-given faculties, and a failure in the proper function of our intellectual abilities as designed and ordered by our Creator. It is also a failure in the exercise of a particular modality of those faculties, namely a failure not of our cognitive capacity to construct and follow arguments but a radical failure of spiritual perception. Indeed part of our cognitive self-deception is to think that coming to the truth about God is a matter of good arguments directed at the generation of theological truth worthy of our assent and adoption. The failure is crucially one of failure in perception, of not seeing what is at stake, and of not realizing the limitations of our ability to understand what is stated in our theological discourse.

Here is one way in which Symeon describes the effects of ancestral sin:

> Later, though, when men had multiplied, and from their youth had turned their thoughts to evil, they were dragged down to forgetfulness and ignorance of the God who had made them, and worshipped not only idols and demons as gods, but even deified that very creation which God had given them for their service. They gave themselves up to every debauchery and unclean activity, soiling the earth, the air, the sky, and everything beneath it by their unnatural practices.
>
> (Symeon 1996a: 30)[1]

The antidote to such failure is a fitting repair of our cognitive faculties represented by the repair of our spiritual senses. That repair involves a host of divine actions working within us so that we can eventually see the truth for ourselves, and, more dramatically, know that we have seen the truth for ourselves. Symeon has a rich array of divine-action predicates at his disposal at this point. Spelling out the details of the divine action at stake in this is a theological exercise that must be laid aside here. What is of great interest is the account he gives of the human actions and experiences that can show up. At the risk of pulling apart what is a positive, carefully integrated epistemic vision, I shall provide an enumerated account of the various elements in play.

First, there is a pertinent social dimension to the process of epistemic healing and transformation. This is visible generally in the role of the church in providing relevant concepts, teaching, and practices without which one will be confused. It is visible more specifically in the crucial role that spiritual fathers and mentors play in inflaming and motivating one to take seriously the possibility of salvation. Thus communal and personal testimonies play an important part in getting cognitive transformation off the ground. Moreover, the semantic resources supplied in the teachings and practices of the church constitute an additional social dimension.

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[1] I thank St. Vladimir's Seminary Press for permission to quote from Symeon 1996a.

Second, there is an array of pertinent practices without which there will be no significant cognitive transformation. These practices are broadly moral, spiritual, and ecclesial. The moral and spiritual involve such practices as repentance, the self-examination of conscience, identifying and struggling with known vices, self-denial, obedience to one's spiritual father, and the pursuit of positive virtues. The ecclesial involve baptism, eucharistic engagement, and sincere participation in the manifold feasts and services of the church. Unfortunately, the latter can readily be practiced in an inept and misleading manner given the malpractice and inadequate teaching of the church's priests and leaders. Thus it is easy to fall into purely external participation in these practices and to adopt a faulty understanding of their goals and of how they operate. It is tempting to rely on a purely external vision of, say, baptism, or of the Eucharist, and rely on participation unaccompanied by the psychologically costly moral and spiritual practices characteristically essential to cognitive transformation. If anything, the latter are more important, although it is wise not to exaggerate Symeon's controversial opposition to standard conceptions of, say, apostolic succession. The latter do indeed have profound implications for any doctrine of the church's ministry but need to be carefully nuanced.

Symeon describes how these practices work in way that brings out their epistemic overtones. Thus, speaking of the commandments, he writes:

> …the commandments [are] the tools which the Word as Carpenter reforms and remakes the workers of His commandments, such that through their operation we may be purified and illumined, progressing by grace of the Spirit in the knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.
>
> (Symeon 1996a: 68–9)

Elsewhere he speaks of the effects of the practices as those of healing:

> Then, just as he who has been physically stripped naked sees the wounds of his body, so he who has been stripped spiritually may clearly see the passions that cling to his soul, such as ambition, avarice, rancor, hatred of his brethren, envy, jealousy, contentiousness (*cf. Phil. 1:15*), and all the rest. So he applies the commandments to them as medicines and trials as cautery, and is humbled and sorrowful, and fervently seeks God's help.
>
> (Symeon 1980: 188)

Third, Symeon takes the bold step of including his own experience of God by way of illustration and testimony. He speaks of his experience in terms of a third person rather than in terms of his own name:

> One day, as he stood and recited, 'God, have mercy on me a sinner' (Luke 18: 13), uttering it with his mind rather than his mouth, suddenly a flood of divine radiance

> appeared from above and filled the room. As this happened the young man lost all awareness of his surroundings and forgot that he was in a house or that he was under a roof. He saw nothing but light all around him and did not know if he was standing on the ground. He was not afraid of falling; he was not concerned with the world, nor did anything pertaining to men and corporeal beings enter into his mind. Instead, he was wholly in the presence of immaterial light and seemed to himself to have turned into light. Oblivious of all the world he was filled with tears and with ineffable joy and gladness. His mind then ascended to heaven and beheld yet another light, which was clearer than that which was close at hand. In a wonderful manner there appeared to him standing close to that light, the saint of whom we have spoken, the old man equal to angels who had given him the commandment and the book (Symeon the Studite).
>
> (Symeon 1980: 245–6)

Though Symeon's account of the nature of this experience is stated with great boldness, it is carefully nuanced. Thus this experience comes as part of a journey in which one makes progress little by little in a way that is fitted for the person-relative needs of each person. Moreover, in the beginning one may naturally meet what is surprising and beyond which one must move as guided by the Holy Spirit. To make this point he deploys the old image of the prisoner in a cell in an interesting manner:

> The rapture of the mind does not apply to the perfect, but to beginners. Think, for example, of someone who is born and raised in a dark and gloomy prison cell. In some momentary gleam from a lamp he just begins to make out, barely, a little something of his room, but remains ignorant that outside the sun is shining, not to mention everything else—I mean just this visible world and all the innumerable works and creations of God. It is exactly thus for the person who lives in the dark prison of this world's perceptions. When he is illumined by even the briefest knowledge and begins haltingly to pick out some small, dim awareness of the mysteries of our faith, he still remains ignorant in every respect of God's eternal good things, the inheritance of the saints.
>
> (Symeon 1996a: 75)

Symeon uses the same image as an exhortation to move forward in the journey into divine love and as a description of its effects on returning to our everyday lives:

> Whenever therefore we seek with all seriousness, with all our faith and longing—not indeed to see the light which lies outside this prison, nor the things which exist in that light and in that world (for no one who ever sought these things was found worthy of seeing them, nor certainly ever will behold them)—but who instead seek first of all to keep the commandments of God, to repent, to grieve, to be humbled, and all the rest of what we talked about above, then indeed something is opened up in us, like a little hole in the visible roof of the heavens, and the light of the world above, immaterial and spiritual, peeks around it. When the soul perceives this, it enters wholly and completely into ecstasy. It becomes all astonishment. It beholds a new wonder, a wonder supremely strange which up to that moment it had never before seen, and in

> which it abides as it were caught up into heaven and compelled to be present there, and to comprehend it incomprehensibly. In seeing heaven both day and night, the soul is taught from it, and every day learns from it that it is without evening, infinite, and inexpressible. Returning to the prison again the soul no longer desires the world, but longs to see once more that other place and that which it contains.
>
> (Symeon 1996a: 77)

It is tempting to relegate all this to the arena of 'mystical theology' and look at it from afar as simply one important strand in a unique trajectory of religious experience that is given to the few. This is not how Symeon sees the matter; he invites all to seek and find for themselves for it is something that God has planned even before creation took place:

> He [God] invites everyone from east to west, I mean both Hebrews and Greeks. As we have often said, He, as God, knew beforehand the disobedience of the Hebrews by reason of their faithlessness, and the conversion of the Gentiles out of faith. And, before the ages, He predestined that as many as should believe in Him and be baptized in His name, that is, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and eat the pure body of his Son and drink His precious blood, would be justified from sin, which is to say, would be freed and glorified, and become partakers of life everlasting—just as He Himself, the Master of all, has said: 'He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has everlasting life' (Jn. 6:54), and: 'He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life' (Jn. 5:24).
>
> (Symeon 1996a: 114)

Symeon may be mistaken in identifying what is involved in 'life everlasting' or 'in passing from death to life', but he clearly does not limit what is at issue to the chosen few.

Fourth, the crucial epistemic analogue for designating experience of God is that of perception of the divine, or, more generally, the reliable functioning of our spiritual senses. Symeon provides a rich account of what this involves:

> He [the human agent] possesses a single perception in a unique soul and intellect and reason. When this perception is divided up five ways according to the physical necessities of the body, it manifests its activity by changing unchangeably, such that it is not the sight that sees, but the soul which sees by means of sight, and the same holds true for hearing and smelling, for tasting, and for distinguishing by touch. With regard to spiritual matters, however, the soul is no longer obliged to discern through the windows of the senses. It no longer seeks to open the eyes in order to see or contemplate some existing thing, nor the ears in order to admit discourse. Neither does it require lips or tongue in order to distinguish sweet from bitter, nor hands in order to know by means of them what is rough, or soft, or smooth. Rather, perception goes outside all of these and is gathered together wholly within the intellect, as being naturally consequent upon the latter and inseparably one with it. To put it more precisely, it possesses the five senses within itself as one rather than several.
>
> (Symeon 1996a: 122–3)

Fifth, given this account of the spiritual senses, it is possible to have genuine assurance that our sins are forgiven, that we have discovered the truth about God, and to recognize others who possess this knowledge. These are not a matter of mere conjecture or hope; they are an obvious correlate of the relevant experiences:

> He [God] knows, and is recognized, and is perceived as knowing. For the one who is known by God knows that he is known, and he who sees God knows that God sees him. He who does not see God, however, does not know that God sees him, in that he does not see, though he may see everything else and misses nothing.
>
> (Symeon 1996a: 123)

Assurance is not just an adiaphoron of Christian teaching; it is constitutive of Christian teaching. 'If someone says that each of us believers has received and possesses the Spirit without being aware of it, he blasphemes' (Symeon 1996a: 158). He rejects the claim that we should only think of such experience as a future state to be hoped for rather than expected in the present life:

> Therefore all these things, and others yet more which it is not possible for a man to list, will Christ become for those who believe in Him. Nor will this be only in the age to come, but first in this life, then later in the future age as well. And if here more obscurely and there more perfectly, still the believers do see plainly and receive here-below, already, the first fruits of all that is beyond. For while they do not receive all the promises here-below, yet neither do they remain without any portion or taste of the things to come by hoping for everything there and merely existing here.
>
> (Symeon 1996a: 164)

One might also see the strong emphasis on assurance as implicitly derived from recognition of the fulfilment of divine promises (Alston 1993). The language of promise and fulfilment is both implicit and explicit. In this example he plays off the language of Paul in Romans 10:

> When we confess with our mouths and repent our former lawlessness from the depths of our souls, then immediately—just as God, the Word of the Father, entered into the Virgin's womb—even so do we receive the Word in us, as a kind of seed, while we are being taught the faith. Be amazed on hearing of this dreadful mystery, and welcome this word, worthy of acceptance, with all assurance and faith.
>
> (Symeon 1996a: 55)

Sixth, even though the spiritual senses are reliable, they are inherently limited in their capacity to capture the reality that they depict. The truth involved transcends their reach even though it is sufficiently accessible to be acknowledged and sufficiently effective to bring about radical moral transformation. We are dealing with a subject matter that 'touches on what transcends words and reason and intellect' (Symeon 1996a: 67). 'For by the very experience of the latter [of gazing upon the love which is God] you will have learned that they are all inexpressible in words, and that the mind cannot comprehend them' (Symeon 1996a: 66).

We can pursue Symeon's articulation of the significance of the foregoing claim by noting three further features of his position. To begin, this feature explains why many fail to comprehend the Gospel and the faith of the church. Because they know nothing for themselves of the experience of which he speaks they are blind and deaf to what they hear. He speaks of theologians who are incapable of reading the scriptures aright. 'We mix everything up. We twist the whole of holy Scripture to our own damnation by misinterpreting it. It is as if we try to make Scripture an accomplice in our own passions, our lusts, and our perdition' (Symeon 1996a: 37). He graphically describes the reaction of those who despise those who would speak of intimate knowledge of God as he expounds it. He accuses them of:

> … locking the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven against themselves and hindering anyone else who might wish from entering. If, indeed, they hear of someone else who has struggled lawfully with the Lord's commandments and has become humble in his heart and thoughts, that he is purified from every kind of passion and is proclaiming to all the mighty acts of God—that is, as many things as God has done for him in accordance with His unfailing promises and how, for one, speaking for the edification of his hearers, he was made worthy of seeing the light of God in the light of glory, and, for another, how he knows consciously in himself of the visitation and operation of the Holy Spirit, and has become himself holy in the Holy Spirit—then immediately, like ravening dogs, they bark at him and try if possible to gobble up the man who says such things. 'Stop!' they say, 'you deluded and prideful man! Who in our time has become such as the holy fathers became? Who then ever saw God or ever could see any part of Him? Who ever received the Holy Spirit to such a degree that he was made worthy of seeing through Him the Father and the Son? Stop! Lest we stone you to death with rocks!'
>
> (Symeon 1996b: 124–5)

Furthermore, the ability to effect semantic success in articulating the faith of the church is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to some in the church for the benefit of the whole. Using the classic image of the church as the body of Christ with different parts and gifts, he speaks of those 'who take the function of the thighs since they carry in themselves the fecundity of the concepts adequate to God of mystical theology' (Symeon 1996a: 4).

Moreover, those who would teach the faith today need to present the intellectual content of the faith as crystallized in church dogma; they themselves should enter the experience that lies in part behind church dogma. Hence teaching theology or interpreting the scriptures without this knowledge is 'vain babble' (Symeon 1996a: 79). Laying hold of the apostolic office without it is a matter of holding 'the Heavenly King in contempt, like a nobody …' (Symeon 1996a: 80). It is statements like these which attacked any idea of mere physical transmission of the gift of teaching, say, through bishops, which may well explain the reticence with which he is received (Ware 1990: vii). He is deeply committed to a charismatic and not just apostolic vision of handing over the faith of the church. Indeed anyone who lays claim to be apostolic should ensure first and foremost that they share the experience of God to be found in the lives of the apostles.

Seventh, the final goal of Symeon's epistemology is nothing less than a direct knowledge of the triune God depicted in the scriptures and the tradition of the church. Such knowledge of God is a matter of stupendous surprise, evoking endless wonder and delight. It is also incomparably more valuable that all other forms of knowledge. Furthermore, it is what God has predestined from the beginning of the world for those who fulfil the relevant conditions as instructed and assisted by divine grace and imparted wisdom. Moreover, it represents a proleptic foretaste of the knowledge that will be fully realized in heaven.

## Concluding Reflections

The above account provides a meaty summary of the core epistemic proposals that show up in Symeon. The seven elements described are a first attempt to invite further reflection on his epistemology of theology. As such they are open to correction and further elaboration. By way of conclusion it may be helpful to indicate some questions and issues that deserve further investigation.

First, might Symeon's proposals provide a more fruitful way of thinking about the epistemic significance of scripture and tradition? We might capture this in the slogan: 'Theological propositions are true not because they are found in scripture; instead, they are in scripture because they are true.' This, while merely a first step, would in turn require a very different vision of scripture, perhaps one that focuses on the mediation of divine wisdom and on soteriological efficacy rather than on standard views of divine authorship and propositional revelation.

Second, how might we combine Symeon's externalist orientation that focuses on reliable belief-producing practices with a more internalist orientation that focuses on fitting arguments for the truth claims of Christian theology? While one can understand Symeon's harsh criticism of his opponents and their bookish, logically ordered orientation, his criticisms are much too abrupt and fail to take the measure of the epistemic strengths.

Third, how might we best capture the epistemic significance of perception of the divine found in Symeon with the various accounts of perception found in the literature? One thinks of the suggestions found in Swinburne (2004) who deploys a principle of initial credulity, in Alston (1991) who works in terms of epistemic practices, in Plantinga (2000) who uses the notion of *sensus divinitatis*, and in Abraham (2010) who reclaims the notion of *oculus contemplationis*. In turn this investigation would take us into debates about the merits of cumulative case arguments for Christian theism and its rival option as developed within Reformed epistemology.

Fourth, how might we find a fitting way to bring together the confidence of Symeon in the cataphatic content of doctrine with the powerful apophatic strains that are so crucial in his overall deliberations? Perhaps our final conclusion will be that this will always be a matter of delicate judgement and discernment; we cannot eradicate the intuitive and the informal. Yet surely we can give fitting descriptions of our intuitions and judgements and perhaps provide cogent illustrations of their articulation.

Fifth, how should we think through the psychological and cognitive interaction of the semantic resources provided in the teachings and practices of the church with the experiences that are characteristic of the journey depicted in prose and poetry by Symeon? Here the notion of interanimation developed by Caroline Franks Davis (1989) might prove especially helpful.

Finally, how might we find ways to explore what are initially straightforward theological and spiritual proposals, given as essential to his vision spiritual direction, with the delicate tools that are needed to do justice to their epistemological significance and that require rigorous epistemological investigation in their own right? We do not normally associate spiritual direction with rigorous epistemological enquiry. One belongs in the confessional, the pulpit, and the church; the other belongs in the university and in academic conferences. It is easy to play them off against each other. Symeon shows otherwise. So too do the recent revolutions in general epistemology that have occurred over the last generation in analytic philosophy. One only has to think of the development of externalism and the work in virtue theory to realize the whole new world that has opened up before us. There are, of course, no free lunches in epistemology. What has changed is the menu of options and the refiguring of prices that we pay for the meals we now can consume and assimilate.

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# CHAPTER 25

# ANSELM

DAVID BROWN

According to Anselm (1033–1109 CE), religious belief or trust in God (*fides* or *fiducia*), though a divine gift, does not in itself bring knowledge (*scientia*). For that something more is required, some increase in intelligibility or understanding (*intellectus*). While such an account of knowledge might have placed exclusive reliance on reason (*ratio*) in achieving such a goal, it is only one of three means acknowledged by Anselm; the other two are teaching (*doctrina*) and experience (*experimentum*) (*Memorials*: 120, 306). Although in the history of Christianity these three sources have been frequently pitted against each other, Anselm was much more confident of a reconciliation than was Augustine (see *Letter* 143 for illusory reasons).

Not surprisingly, given his vocation as a Benedictine monk, Anselm saw meditative contemplation as integral to his life, but the experience this generated could be informed no less by philosophical reflection than by careful reading of the scriptures. While stressing that reason was no less a divine gift than faith (*Proslogion*: 4), his most relevant conviction was that certain forms of reasoning were actually conducive to monastic contemplation. It is here that scholars have underestimated the importance of aesthetic considerations in Anselm's epistemology, for such reasons could be used not just to ground a particular conception of God but also to add to its power in facilitating experience of the God so described. It is this kind of reasoning that I want to highlight in this chapter, not least because both its extent and its importance have been hitherto greatly underestimated. But let me first place my discussion in the context of a familiar debate.

## Reason and Revelation

Most twentieth-century discussion of Anselm could be seen as symptomatic of a wider division between philosophy and theology, with analytic philosophers finding the real heart of Anselm in formal arguments and theologians instead stressing his prayers and meditations as articulated doctrine. Justification for one side or the other could be given most effectively by appealing to certain works rather than others; a more philosophical account of his views on atonement, for example, by considering *Why God Became Man*, or a more theological one with his *Meditation on Human Redemption*. Equally, the rival interpretations can be seen to arise from within the same text, including a work like the *Proslogion* where his famous ontological argument is developed, since the work begins with a prayer. Indeed, it was this distinctive character of the *Proslogion* on which Karl Barth laid particular emphasis in his famous riposte to philosophers (Barth 1958).

But neither answer is quite right. The problem is that both suggest a subordination of one thing to another, whereas in Anselm what we appear to have is some sort of parallelism. On the one hand, God is seen to declare truths through the community of faith as it interprets the Bible and Creeds; on the other hand, through philosophical reflection a more profound understanding of those truths is possible. But it is not that a hierarchy is thereby established, for both are seen as divinely given modes of knowing and so should not be allowed to appear in conflict with one another. Indeed, so confident is Anselm of such a reconciliation that not only does he quite happily move back and forth between the two modes of discourse, but he also uses each as a check on the other. Thus it is not only the extent of his philosophical reflections that is sometimes put under constraint by the authority of scripture, but also on occasion we find the process in reverse, with Anselm advocating a modification of current understandings of the Bible or the Nicene Creed as legitimated by formal philosophical analysis. It would be all too easy for theologians to assume that Anselm's definitive view on the subject is given in various dismissive comments he makes on those who challenge the authority of the Bible and the church, as when he observes it is 'as if bats and owls, who see the heavens at night, should argue the midday rays of the sun with eagles, who gaze on the very sun with undeflected vision' (Anselm of Canterbury 1998 (henceforth DE) 236). But such remarks need to be set against his certainty that philosophical reflection requires us to deny the literal truth of scripture where, for example, it appears to assert God as the cause of evil (*On the Fall of the Devil*: 1, DE 196), or again to go beyond the Creed where logic necessitates that we do so, as on the question of the *Filioque* (*On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*: 11, DE 420–3).

Yet even to talk thus of these two methods running in parallel remains an insufficient corrective to the common view. This is because in Anselm's estimation it is not as though the two methods should be pursued independently—one in his study and the other on his knees, for it cannot be too strongly emphasized that Anselm writes as a Benedictine monk with specific presuppositions about how all thought about God should proceed. Like Lanfranc, his predecessor in the see of Canterbury, he had been summoned to be archbishop from his Benedictine monastery at Bec in Normandy, and so it was that even as archbishop (from 1093) he continued to abide by the meditative rules of the Benedictine order. That is why making the two forms of knowledge more interactive does not go quite far enough in comprehending Anselm's approach. What is still lacking is recognition of how both are required to inform Christian meditation and practice. In other words, scripture and argument have not completed their proper role until their conclusions are fully absorbed into prayer.

As with the other two sources of knowledge, the experience of prayer can also sometimes turn back on the other two, and help to shape and characterize them. A fascinating example is Anselm's *Prayer to St. Paul* (Ward 1973: 141–56) which becomes an extended meditation on Christ as Mother, and so of Paul as mother in his turn. At one level one might point for authority to Jesus's use of the image of the female hen gathering her chicks under her wings (Mt. 23:37), which Anselm quotes more than once in the prayer, but his application of the image goes well beyond this into the image of Christ birthing our souls. And here Anselm's appeal is to his own personal experience in prayer and elsewhere: 'Why should I conceal what you have revealed? Why should I hide what you have done? You have revealed yourselves as mothers; I know myself to be a son' (Ward 1973: 154, lines 434–8).

So, argumentative analysis was pursued to deepen the kind of relationship made possible in prayer and worship no less than more conventional forms of monastic reflection. Although Anselm offers us no extended discussion of degrees of knowledge, he is quite clear that some forms are superior to others. In particular, a very high premium is put on experiential knowledge: 'the [knowledge of] one who experiences is superior to the knowledge of one who hears to the same degree that experience of a thing is superior to hearing about it' (*On the Incarnation of the Word*: 1). Again, reasons can sometimes only be properly perceived when set in relation to experience: 'reasons are more readily and easily discernible in Christ's life and works than can be demonstrated by reason alone, hypothetically, as it were, before experience of the events' (*Why God Became Man*: II, 11, DE 331). Unfortunately, Anselm nowhere tells us exactly what he means by experience of God. His use of the verb *experior* is quite wide-ranging and includes both sense-experience and personal relationships. Southern proposes that in *On the Incarnation of the Word* and elsewhere it should be taken 'to refer to some inner mystical experience of the truth of a doctrine which lies beyond the limits of rational explanation' (Southern 1995: 178–9). But I would venture to suggest the parallel with personal knowledge remains as the exploration of aesthetic reasons now works to transform contemplative understanding of the nature of God and of divine relations with the world. So we seriously misunderstand his discussion of the ontological argument or his treatment of the atonement *Christo remoto* ('supposing Christ were left out of the case': *Why God Became Man*: Preface, DE 261) if we suppose them to function purely as intellectual exercises.

To acknowledge that for Anselm personal knowledge of God achievable through contemplation is the highest form of knowledge is in no way to contest that understanding achievable through reason is equally knowledge. It is aesthetic considerations, however, that most obviously reveal the connection between the two. Such philosophical analysis helps disclose a God who in his being, speech, and acts displays a beauty in the divine that can properly become an objective of contemplative wonder and thus deepen the nature of the experiential relationship. Admittedly, terms with such overtones are found most frequently in *Why God Became Man: convenio* and cognates (thirty-four times), *decet* (seventeen times), and *oportet* (twenty-five), all translatable in terms of suitability, fittingness, and appropriateness. However, Southern is surely wrong to deduce that this work demonstrates a new interest for Anselm in beauty (1995: 212). Although the terminology may vary, a concern with beauty is an interlinking theme throughout Anselm's career. Indeed, such a concern can even be found in the forms of language that Anselm uses to address God, with the words of his prayers carefully proportioned and balanced (see Hogg 2004: 29–37).

Among recent scholarly writing, the person who has taken most cognizance of Anselm's concern with beauty is David S. Hogg. However, although there is much in his writing that is illuminating, my own emphasis here will prove rather different for two main reasons: first, Hogg sides with Barth and so tends to see Anselm in exclusively theological terms. Second, he assumes too easy a reconciliation between Anselm's view of beauty and that found in scripture. To indicate the range of Anselm's philosophical concern with beauty, I want to offer here a survey of a number of Anselm's principal works, beginning with *On Truth* (*De Veritate*) but not in strictly historical order, as this will make exposition easier.

## *ON TRUTH*

It is important to note the way in which truth is by no means confined to propositions. Instead, it is found equally in actions and principally identified with God who is Truth itself. That latter assertion not only takes Anselm far from modern discussions of truth but also leads him to deny that truth is simply a matter of what is the case. Instead, truth is what ought to be so, and thus requires a 'fittingness' in respect of the divine will, or, to use his favoured term in this discussion, *rectitudo* or 'correctness'. As Anselm puts it early on in this dialogue, 'truth is no different from rectitude' (2, DE 154). But by such rectitude Anselm does not intend simply a conventional correspondence theory of truth, with propositions judged merely by whether they correspond to the way things are. Instead, he builds in an implicit teleological aim with speech aiming at what ought to be the case so that biblical statements about truth in will and action can then be brought under the same kind of analysis. So, to mention two of the examples he uses, Christ in John's Gospel declares that 'he who does the truth comes to the light' (3.21), while the Devil's will and character are declared to be of such a kind that he 'did not abide in the truth' (8.44).

Such an analysis certainly takes Anselm far from any contemporary discussion of truth, but that is in part because of where the dialogue is ultimately leading, with the teleological character of all such truth ultimately grounded in a single will whose aim is rectitude, or what ought to be the case, namely God. Given that wider frame it is surely hard not to see the goal in Anselm's account as ultimately an aesthetic one. Instead of truth being a term of convenience with which to discuss the character of our world, it has become a guide to an order and purpose within particulars that fits them appropriately into a much larger, single harmonious whole. So the essay concludes: 'Truth is improperly said to be "of this or that thing" . . . . [T]he highest truth subsists in itself and belongs to no thing. But when something is in accord with it, we then speak of its truth and rectitude' (13, DE 173–4). Yet, although God is thus treated as the determining cause of all truth, Anselm refuses to apply his rectitude analysis to the divine in itself: 'the highest Truth is not rectitude because it owes anything. All other things owe him but he owes nothing to another' (10, DE 164). However, although the desire not to impose limitations on God is understandable, such a qualification does seem to weaken Anselm's analysis, since in effect truth only tells us about what is derived from God, not about how God essentially is. It is to Anselm's understanding of God that we next turn.

## *PROSLOGION*

The *Proslogion* must remain with its Latin title since there is no English equivalent. It is the work that Anselm wrote 'after' his *Monologion* or 'monologue.' Lanfranc had criticized the earlier work because of its lack of appeal to authorities, but what worried Anselm instead was the multiple nature of his arguments that bore no essential relation to one another. Here at last some sort of elegance could be achieved in which the ontological argument became the one on which all the others would depend (*Prologion*, Preface, DE 82).

While such an argument can provide the non-believer with knowledge, it does not of itself offer saving faith. At most it might make the heart of 'the fool' more receptive to the action of divine grace. But equally faith should not be the believer's final resting place. An inaccurate Vulgate version of Isaiah 7.9 (*nisi credideritis non intelligetis*) had already set a precedent that had been taken up by Augustine: 'understand in order to believe, believe in order to understand' (Sermon: 43). But in interpreting the famous phrase, perhaps most helpful is *Letter* 136: 'a Christian should progress through faith to understanding, not reach faith through understanding, or, if he cannot understand, fall away from faith.' Even so it would be a mistake to think that the net result is conceived of as being only increased intellectual understanding.

Almost all discussion of the *Proslogion* has focused on the validity or otherwise of the two versions of the ontological argument (*Proslogion*: 2–3, DE 87–8) and the various divine attributes that are derived logically from that initial definition of God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived', and indeed most philosophy students only consider expositions of the ontological argument that dispense altogether with any contextual setting. That is a pity because the inevitable result is complete neglect of the way in which Anselm sees the beauty of the divine as what is now better disclosed to his monks. God is seen as the source of all that is worthy to be praised, with each of the divine attributes perfectly integrated with each other such that it makes sense to talk of God as a 'simple' being. Admittedly, the explicit terminology, as in Aquinas, is not employed, but there can be no doubt that the same idea is here. So, for example, having accepted the view that 'parts' would entail that God was not 'absolutely one', Anselm concludes:

> You are so much one and the same with yourself that in nothing are you dissimilar with yourself. Indeed, you are unity itself not divisible by any mind. Life and wisdom and the other attributes, then, are not parts of you, but all are one and each of them is wholly what you are and what all the others are.
>
> (*Proslogion*: 18, DE 98)

Although pushed that far the doctrine is hard to comprehend, even in our own day the aesthetic connection is not uncommonly made. Simplicity continues to be used sometimes as a criterion of truth in science or philosophy of religion and the resultant theories described as 'elegant', thus clearly revealing the criterion's aesthetic roots. What is excluded in the divine case is even the theoretical possibility of conflict between any of the attributes: no discord but instead perfect harmony. Such connections would have been much more apparent in the long tradition of Christianity influenced by Platonism, of which Anselm is part, not least in that his choice of definition for God, for the divine as 'that than which no greater can be conceived' emerges naturally out of a Platonism that assumed hierarchy of being whereas there is no obvious scriptural text to which appeal might be made. But irrespective of source or correctness of view, what Anselm offered his fellow monks was deeper contemplative wonder at the nature of God, and he opened them up to be conformed more closely to a similar integrated unity within themselves, made one as God is one, as in the concluding prayer of Augustine's *De Trinitate*.

Although nowhere explicitly asserted, such a concern for beauty can be seen even in the structure of the ontological argument itself, where an aesthetic analogy is used to illustrate the difference between existence in the mind and existence in reality:

> Thus when a painter plans beforehand what he is going to execute, he has the picture in his mind, but he does not yet think that it actually exists because he has not yet executed it. However, when he has actually painted it, then he both has it in his mind and understands that it exists because he has now made it.
>
> (*Proslogion* 2, DE 87)

Later on, a series of metaphors underscore a deeper version of that underlying aesthetic concern, with the soul 'dazzled' by the divine 'splendour, overcome by its fullness, overwhelmed by its immensity, confused by its extent' (16, DE 96). The result is that when such light is withdrawn, the soul 'looks all about, and does not see your beauty. It listens and does not hear your harmony. It smells and does not sense your fragrance. It tastes and does not recognize your savour. It feels, and does not sense your softness' (17, DE 97). Of course none of these appeals to the five senses can be literally true of God: we simply cannot perceive God as an immaterial being through our senses. So, presumably, the point must be that there are intellectual equivalents to the beauty perceived by these five senses of sight, hearing, smell, tasting, and touch. In a similar way elsewhere he insists that a proper approach to scripture will require the intellectual equivalent of mastication: 'Taste the goodness of your Redeemer … . Chew the honeycomb of his words, suck their flavour … swallow their wholesome sweetness. Chew by thinking, suck by understanding, swallow by loving and rejoicing. Be glad to chew, be thankful to suck, rejoice to swallow' (*Mediation on Human Redemption*, Ward 1973: 230).

## *CUR DEUS HOMO*

In considering Anselm's treatise *Why God Became Man* it is important not to fall foul of the common misconception of Anselm's view of redemption as simply an anticipation of Calvin's theory of penal substitution. For Calvin Christ pays the legal penalty for human sin, and because that has been immense in its extent, Christ's suffering is also horrendous, with him suffering total alienation from the Father, an alienation that extends beyond Good Friday into Holy Saturday where Calvin reinterprets the descent into hell of the Apostles' Creed as a descent into the deepest abyss of distance from God. Certainly, that stress on suffering in Calvin had ample precedent in both the iconography and preaching of the later Middle Ages, with Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece (*c.*1514) perhaps the most conspicuous example. But the emphasis was significantly different in the earlier Middle Ages, as can be seen in how the descent had been treated. The apocryphal fifth-century *Gospel of Nicodemus* popularized the idea that it was a matter of Christ liberating the faithful departed of earlier generations, an image so powerful that it has remained the principal icon for the Resurrection and its significance in Eastern Orthodoxy until this day. But there was also a similar restraint in respect of what had happened on the Cross. An image like Grünewald's would have been inconceivable during the time at which Anselm lived.

And this is also reflected in his theory of redemption. Christ's death was intended to restore the moral and aesthetic balance of the world. In sinning, human beings had failed to pay the debt they owed to their creator, and, because they owed their very existence to God, nothing that they did could recompense God and restore a proper balance (give 'satisfaction', in Anselm's terminology). Thus only by God the Son entering our world could proper satisfaction be made, by someone giving back to God what was not owed to God, and that is Christ's death, for death was not owed by him to God since he had committed no sin. Although according to Anselm's view Christ's perfect life did nothing to reduce what was wanting in the human balance since obedience was owed for the gift of life itself, it is important to note that Christ's death was sufficient recompense since it was in no sense owed. Thus, unlike with Calvin, whatever degree of suffering Jesus endured on the cross is strictly irrelevant to the argument. This of course is not to suggest that Anselm denies or ignores Christ's suffering, only that it does not lie at the core of this argument for the necessity of Christ as Saviour to be both divine and human.

It is an argument carefully structured with numerous stages, to meet possible counter-objections. What such an analysis is most obviously intended to indicate is that divine forethought left no aspect of human redemption unconsidered. As I have expounded elsewhere the various stages of the argument in detail and also offered an overall assessment (Brown 2004), here I shall focus exclusively on how aesthetic considerations are brought to bear. Certainly, the most important to note is Anselm's notion of 'satisfaction'. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the notion was parodied by numerous theologians as amounting to little more than an appeal to the social mores of his day, with the idea modelled on the satisfaction due by a vassal to a senior lord for infringement of his rights. But this is grossly unfair to Anselm for at least two reasons. First, despite serious conflicts with the two monarchs under whom he served (William II and Henry II), the evidence suggests that these disputes were bound up not with the principal rights issue of the time (investiture) but rather with the archbishop's simple desire to remain loyal to his oath of allegiance to the Pope (Southern 1995: 228–307, esp. 280–4). But second, and more substantially, much of the problem stems from over-literal translations. Consider the following translation: 'Everyone who sins is under an obligation to repay to God the honour which he has violently taken from him, and this is the satisfaction which every sinner is obliged to give to God' (I, 11, DE 283). Certainly, the literal equivalents of 'honour' and 'satisfaction' are there in the Latin, but what the English now conceals are the connections running back ultimately to the Lord's Prayer which in the original Greek (Mt. 6:12) petitions that 'our debts' or 'what we owe' should be forgiven. If it is objected that the connection is less clear in the Latin of the Vulgate that Anselm would have used (*delicta* or 'what falls short'), it may be observed that the relevant chapter of Anselm opens with him leaving us in no doubt about how he understands *delicta*: 'to sin is nothing other than not to give God what is owed to him (I. 11, DE 283). So, more loyal to Anselm's train of thought (and also thus more congruent with what Christians have believed across the centuries), we might end up instead with the following alternative translation to the more literal version quoted above: 'Anyone who sins should return to God the respect and worship that he has denied God; in doing this he makes up for the debt he owes to God'. Even so, some will still object that Anselm's ultimate appeal is moral rather than aesthetic, but the way in which this demand for balance and proportion is held to trounce any alternative in divine forgiveness would suggest otherwise: such an idea is described as an 'incongruity' that is 'extremely unfitting' (I, 12, DE 284). Yet to speak of the aesthetic 'trouncing' the moral is again not quite right, since for Anselm goodness and beauty must perfectly coincide, with both alike pointing in the same direction.

Nonetheless, it is clear that aesthetic considerations, for Anselm, have the upper hand in guiding the path to knowledge in this area, a fact that can equally well be illustrated from some of the more specific premises of the argument. So, for example, considering why it is more fitting (*convenientius*) for the Son to become incarnate than the Father or Holy Spirit, Anselm points to resultant 'inequalities', but by this he appears to mean not differences in power but rather infelicities in resulting descriptions of the relationships. Thus:

> if it is to be the Father who is made incarnate, there will be two grandsons in the Trinity, because, through his assumption of manhood, the Father will be grandson of the parents of the Virgin, and the Word, despite having no trace of human nature in him, will none the less be the grandson of the Virgin, because he will be the son of her son.
>
> (II, 9, DE 324)

Or again there is extended discussion of whether the number of the saved is determined by the number of angels who have fallen (I, 16–18, DE 289–300). While conceding that none of his speculations can be allowed to run 'contrary to holy scripture', Anselm is careful to argue for the openness of the relevant biblical text to alternative possibilities (I, 18, esp. DE 298–9). According to Deuteronomy 32:8, 'God fixed the bounds of the peoples, according to the number of the sons of God' (RSV). That translation neatly captures the ambiguity in the two Latin translations available to Anselm, one of which translated the last phrase as 'children of Israel' and the other as 'angels of God'. But, Anselm argues, even if the latter was intended, this still admits of a meaning that would include 'angels' as human beings. So, once again, these two means of accessing knowledge can be seen to interact despite his apparent submission of one (reasoned reflection) to the other (scripture). Even more important to note here is his insistence that, whatever the correct answer, God's actions have been guided by identification of a perfect figure for the number of those elected to heaven: 'a perfect number' such that 'it would not be fitting for it to be greater or less' (I, 16, DE 290). So, although Anselm does not claim to know their overall number, he does believe it to be foreknown by God, and to be determined ultimately by aesthetic considerations, even if moral ones also play an indispensable part (with fallen angels unable to be restored, and human beings redeemed only through the atonement of Christ).

## *ON THE PROCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*

Issues concerned with understanding the Christian doctrine of the Trinity are a topic to which Anselm returned a number of times. Although technically interesting and subtly pursued, most of what he says was anticipated in Saint Augustine. What is most interesting and distinctive in respect of his approach to epistemology can be found in a work undertaken at the request of the Pope for the Council of Bari in 1098 that attempted a reconciliation between the Catholic West and Orthodox East. Subsequently written up as *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, it defends the Western addition of the *Filioque* to the Nicene Creed, according to which the Spirit 'proceeds from the Father *and the Son*' (emphasis added) rather than just from the Father, as the original creedal formulation had asserted and which Eastern Orthodoxy had retained. What makes Anselm's response to the dispute epistemologically interesting is the three principal elements in his discussion with the representatives of Orthodoxy, none of which resort to appeal to papal authority.

First, there is his assertion that the addition is a legitimate conclusion to draw from the words of scripture. Thus, twice in John's Gospel the Holy Spirit is said to be sent through Jesus (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; *On the Procession*: 4, DE 405–8), while in Matthew's Gospel a verse that mentions Father and Son but not the Spirit is taken to imply that the Spirit must be derived from them both (Mt. 11:27; *On the Procession*: 7, DE 411–13). Nor is such indirect knowledge from scripture by any means unique to the *Filioque*. It is true even of the doctrine of the Trinity itself: 'where do we in so many words read in the prophets or the evangelists or the apostle that one God is three persons, or the one God is the Trinity?' (*On the Procession*: 11). Second, there is his appeal to the church, which is where papal authority might most obviously seem to come into play, in his discussion of the use of the expanded Creed in the Western liturgy. But in fact no mention is made of the Pope on this occasion. Instead, he speaks of the difficulty of assembling Greek as well as Latin bishops to make a decision, with most emphasis placed on an 'orthodox faith that assemblies of the people should profitably read and sing' (*On the Procession*: 13, DE 426). In other words, Anselm's real concern in such appeals to *doctrina* is that worshipping believers should have a full and proper experience of the divine through the liturgy, with papal authority only ever seen as the means towards such an end in the Latin church.

However, by far the greater part of the tract is devoted to his third ground, rational arguments towards the same conclusion. While it cannot be claimed that aesthetic considerations are as prominent as they were in *Why God Became Man*, it is equally the case that they are far from being dormant. Two examples will suffice. First, note how Anselm describes the relationship between divine unity and the relations that constitute the three persons of the Trinity: 'the consequences of this unity and this set of relations are so harmoniously mixed that neither the plurality resulting from the relations is transferable to things in which the simplicity of the aforementioned unity resounds, nor does the unity suppress the plurality whereby we signify the same relations' (*On the Procession*: 1, DE 393). Equally, second, although he nowhere challenges whether any meaningful difference exists in an eternal context between 'begetting' and 'proceeding' in themselves, it is surely significant that he concludes by putting the difference between the three persons thus: 'only the Father is one who is from no one, only the Son is one who is from one, only the Holy Spirit is one from whom no one is' (*On the Procession*: 16, DE 434). If we use 'relates' exclusively to indicate an active relationship and 'is related' exclusively of a passive relation, then another way of putting this is to say: only the Father relates but is not related, only the Son is both related and relates, and only the Spirit does not relate but is related. The beauty of the proportions and balance between the three relations and persons thus becomes readily apparent, and so why aesthetic considerations are after all playing a key role here also in Anselm's thinking.

## Anselm's Approach and its Limitations

It is clear from this brief survey of his writings that Anselm deploys aesthetic considerations in two rather different ways: sometimes as an argument in itself for a particular conclusion, more commonly as confirmation that a particular conclusion is the correct one. Another way of making this distinction is to observe that, whereas for Anselm 'not fitting' entails 'necessarily not true of God' (cf. *Why God Became Man*: 2.8), 'fitting does not of itself automatically carry the same necessity. Both versions, however, rely on the same presupposition that God is beauty and everything derived from the divine must therefore partake of the same characteristic. In doing so, Anselm displays a confidence that few of us would have today. For many, perhaps most, in modern society, beauty is taken to be a purely subjective judgement, dependent on whatever happens to please the individual concerned. But even those who incline towards some objective standard would admit the difficulty of finding any easy reconciliation with questions of truth and goodness. So, for instance, few would deny that the rape scene in the Stanley Kubrick film *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), set to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, has the beauty of a ballet, yet it is hardly a good act. Such problems no doubt explain why there has been such a large-scale retreat from treating beauty as one of the transcendentals directly applicable to God.

But for Christianity the difficulties in fact run much deeper, since there is little evidence to suggest a consistent Christian position on the theme of beauty across the centuries. Thus in Anselm's case his understanding is in fact much more closely allied to notions originating in classical Greece than anything we find in scripture. Although in adopting such a view Anselm reflects the general patristic position, including that of Augustine, it is as well to note the tension. This is not to suggest that scripture must always function as the primary theological norm. It is simply to observe a tension of which Anselm himself was certainly unaware. The noted Old Testament scholar, Gerard von Rad, even maintained that 'Israel lacked all critical reflection on the phenomenon of beauty' (von Rad 1962: I, 365). While that is probably an exaggeration, his words do stand as a caution against Hans Urs von Balthasar's over-confident deployment of the biblical 'glory' as an equivalent term (Balthasar 1982). Certainly, both Hebrew *kabod* and Greek *doxa* are used in an aesthetic sense, but the meaning seems more to do with what overwhelms with its magnificence or splendour rather than with Greek notions of elegance, balance, or proportion. Indeed, quite different words are used of ordinary human beauty (Penchansky 2013), and in the Hebrew scriptures *kabod* is only applied to the human when kings or others might potentially at least offer a similar splendour (e.g. Job 40:10). It is to the late Greek Book of Wisdom that one must turn before beauty in our world and in the divine are firmly linked as in the Greek hierarchical model, with God now described as 'the author of beauty' (13.3). However, in the Fathers even as early as Irenaeus we find aesthetic considerations of this kind being adduced for divine action, as, for example, in his arguments with the Gnostics over why there should only be four gospels (*Against Heresies*: III, xi, 8). By the time of Augustine, divine simplicity is firmly rooted aesthetically (as well as for other motives) and serves as an approach to the problem of evil that sees light and shade as integral to an adequate response (defended in Farrer 1962).

Yet to leave matters on this note of a bewildering variety of approaches to beauty would seem unfair to Anselm, not least because it appears a basic human intuition about the nature of divinity that it should embody all that we positively value, and so should include beauty. So, however great the problems, recent attempts to rescue beauty from the margins of discussions in philosophical theology (e.g. Tallon 2012) are surely to be welcomed. But perhaps the difficulties within Christianity should be seen as in large part self-generated, and it is here that Anselm may still have something to teach us. In marked contrast to much modern writing, he never declared Christ's actual suffering on the cross beautiful; for him it was rather key aspects of the event that were beautiful and which helped determine the divine choice, such as the wood of the cross balancing the tree of the Fall, and so on. Instead, as noted above, Anselm remained remarkably restrained in his description of Christ's sufferings. The pressure to talk of them as beautiful comes only if we suppose *doxa* to be concerned with essentially the same idea. But is it? When John and Paul talk of the divine 'glory' being revealed on the cross, is it not more like something that generates in us a sense of stupor and amazement? While there is no doubt an aesthetic element to such a response, to talk of it sharing anything with delight in beauty is surely perverse. What attracts our admiration and wonder is that a being so removed from such horrors deigns to identify with our experience of them, and so took on what had, in the words of Isaiah, 'no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him' (53.2). In other words, it is the entirely unexpected character of the event that gives it such revelatory significance, not any putative connection with beauty. The 'glory' of which the Bible speaks and which so much modern Christian writing has identified with beauty is really something quite different: a matter of revelation, not natural theology. With that much acknowledged, the beauty of which Anselm spoke and which derives from the Greek tradition can then continue to exercise an epistemological role in philosophical theology, in particular in shaping what is possible for human experience of God. How extensive these roles might be is too large a question to open here.

## Acknowledgement

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## CHAPTER 26

# THOMAS AQUINAS

### JAMES BRENT, O.P.

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 CE) thought that there were manifold ways in which human beings can and do know God. Unfortunately, Aquinas's rich account of these manifold ways of knowing God has been somewhat fragmented in recent centuries by a double polemical context. On the one hand, in the longstanding clash between Catholic thinkers and agnostic or atheistic ones, Catholic thinkers have tended to turn to and emphasize those texts in Aquinas where he argues for the existence of God on philosophical grounds, notably the *quinquae viae* of the *Summa Theologiae*. On the other hand, in the long-standing clash between Catholic and (one strand of) Protestant thinkers about the nature of faith and theology, some Protestants have accused Catholics (especially Aquinas) of seriously overestimating the cognitive abilities of fallen human beings and displacing the word of God given in scripture from the central place it deserves in Christian thought and life. The aim of this chapter is to move past both polemical contexts, and allow Aquinas to tell us what he thinks are the manifold ways of knowing God.

Divine illumination is the organizing principle of Aquinas's whole epistemology of theology. Just as the shining sun makes the eyes to see, so God illuminating persons makes the mind to see. God illuminates human beings by endowing us with various cognitive powers and habits, and moving our cognitive powers and habits actually to operate. Such divine illumination comes in degrees. In the first degree of illumination, which God works in all human beings, one can know God (1) by a general and confused knowledge and (2) by a philosophical wisdom. In the second degree of divine illumination, which God works in those human beings gifted with his grace, one can know God (3) by divine revelation, (4) by faith, (5) by mystical wisdom, and (6) by theological wisdom. Finally, in the third degree of illumination, which God works in the blessed in heaven, one knows God (7) by beatific vision. These degrees of illumination are not multiple acts of God, but one act of a simple God who is now giving being to persons and activating within them manifold forms of knowledge of himself. For Aquinas, God gives these many ways of knowing himself to the human race so that we might come to know him and love him, and by knowing him and loving him, to enjoy God himself as our happiness.

## On Human Nature and Human Knowledge of God

For Aquinas, all human beings by nature are hylomorphically composed of soul and body, and our nature is endowed with cognitive and appetitive powers of external sensation, internal sensation, passions, will, and intellect. My intellect is a share in God's own light: 'The light of natural reason itself is a participation of the divine light' (*ST* I q.12 a.11 ad 3, and all other works of Aquinas, in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*). By virtue of the light of natural reason we abstract from our experience of material things the very natures or forms that things themselves have, and we make judgements about things. These judgements are fundamentally (though not exclusively) in the form of categorical propositions and are either knowledge (*scientia*) or opinion. Knowledge is a judgement in which I hold that S is P because I *see*, either by my senses or by intellectual perception, that the meaning of the term S is contained in the meaning of the term P, or vice versa, or I infer that S is P from such self-evident truths (*per se nota*). An opinion is a judgement in which I hold that S is P, but I do not *see* that S is P from the meaning of the terms themselves or by any inference from self-evident truths. Opinions are probable judgements though not necessarily statistical in their logical form. Aquinas works within an Aristotelian framework in which the human being starts from within a personal and cultural matrix of experience and opinion, and passes through a dialectic of *aporiae* or problematic questions, in order to arrive at understanding of the first principles of various subject matters, and hopefully, at the first principles of reality as a whole (Lear 1988: Ch. 1). To arrive at the first principles of reality as a whole is to arrive at *wisdom*. As one is journeying from experience and opinion to understanding and wisdom, Aquinas thinks, God is giving being to one's intellect and is even activating one's intellect to be actually thinking. God leads one's intellectual operation according to paths traced by divine providence (*ST* I–II q.109 a.1). In this way, Aquinas holds his own kind of aristotelianized-Augustinian illuminationist theory of knowledge.

The theory is externalist in the contemporary sense. A person is not necessarily aware of, nor necessarily has internal access to, being illuminated by God. Furthermore, the person does not necessarily *need* to be aware of being divinely illuminated, or to have internal access to being divinely illuminated, in order for *some* of his or her judgements to be prudent opinion or genuine knowledge. What is accessible to the person from within, at least at the beginning of the epistemic journey to wisdom, is merely whether a judgement is evident to the senses or to the mind, evident or probable, a first principle or inferred, or possesses other such epistemic features, and any of these features may be hard to discern in particular cases. However, for Aquinas, a person cannot possess *wisdom* without being aware in some way of God's universal illumination of the minds of created persons. For wisdom is grasping the highest principle of all things, and God is the highest principle of both being and knowing.

## A General and Confused Knowledge of God

Aquinas thinks that nearly all human beings have a general and confused knowledge of God, and he gives two different accounts of this knowledge. The first stresses the role of knowing goodness:

> To know that God exists in a common and confused way is sown in us by nature, inasmuch as God is man's beatitude. For man naturally desires happiness, and what is naturally desired by man must be naturally known to him. This, however, is not simply to know that God exists; just as to know that someone is approaching is not the same as to know that Peter is approaching, even though it is Peter who is approaching.
>
> (*ST* I q.2 a.1 ad 1; *SCG* lib. I c. 11)

Aquinas says two things about this sort of knowledge of God. First, it is 'common and confused'. All human beings are aware of goodness in general or have a notion of what goodness is—even if they cannot philosophically define goodness. It is the same with happiness. We all have a notion of it even if we cannot say what it is. Furthermore, all of us know that goodness and happiness are real. For we aim at them by nature, and expect our aim to succeed. Now for Aquinas, goodness is really the same as God and so too is happiness (perfect happiness). Therefore, before one becomes explicitly aware of this identity, one knows God without realizing it, just by having the notion of what goodness is or what happiness is and by knowing that goodness and happiness are there to be had. We could say that one knows God by the name of goodness or by the name of happiness rather than distinctly as God. Because one is aware of God without realizing it, because God is fused in with another notion, the knowledge is called confused. Aquinas does not mean the person is epistemically defective. All cognitive development begins in just this sort of confusion, and proceeds by dialectic into clearer understanding. Second, this kind of knowledge is in us 'by nature'. Aquinas seems to mean that either all or almost all human beings have this knowledge.

The second account of this rudimentary knowledge of God stresses the role of perceiving the order of the world:

> For there is a common and confused knowledge of God which is found in, as it were, all human beings; this is due … to the fact that … humans can immediately reach some sort of knowledge of God by natural reason. For, seeing that things in nature run according to a definite order, and that ordering does not occur without an orderer, humans perceive in most cases that there is some orderer of the things that we see. But who or what kind of being, or whether there is but one orderer of nature, is immediately known (*habetur*) in this general consideration.
>
> (*SCG* lib. III c. 38)

Here too Aquinas calls this knowledge of God common and confused, but here he says it occurs in most people. People commonly say about the world that 'there has to be *something* behind it all', and in so doing they are manifesting the sort of knowledge Aquinas points to here. This knowledge is still general. One knows *that* there is at least one principle of world order, a 'something', without yet knowing distinctly *what* this something is or even whether it is one or many. Now for Aquinas, the principle of world order is God. So, by knowing that a principle of world order exists, by knowing that *something* has to be there behind it all, one knows God, though perhaps without realizing it, and without yet knowing him distinctly as God.

It has been asked whether this knowledge of the principle or world order is inferential knowledge or not (Plantinga 1983: 2000). The question is difficult. Pre-philosophical knowledge of God does not seem to be a basic belief. Aquinas's text suggests something inferential. The inference, however, may be as general and as confused as is the conclusion. Even though not a basic belief, this pre-theoretical knowledge could still be deeply compelling, virtually indefeasible in one's mind, a powerful starting point of inquiry, recurring food for thought, and coupled with the innate desire to understand it could drive one to elaborate philosophically sophisticated arguments for the existence of God as a way of trying to put into words what one knows in a more primordial way.

## Philosophical Wisdom

Aquinas also thought that human beings have the capacity to elaborate philosophical arguments for the existence of God as well as certain divine attributes. This is commonly called natural theology, and it has several epistemic features worth noting.

Natural theology is inferential. Its argumentation proceeds from effect to cause: 'Yet from every effect the existence of the cause can be clearly demonstrated, and so we can demonstrate the existence of God from His effects' (*ST* I q.2 a.2 ad 3; cf. *ST* I q.12 a.12 ad 2). Famously, Aquinas argues for the existence of God starting from the fact of motion, efficient causation, contingent being, participated perfections, and teleological ordering (*ST* I q.2 a.3)

Natural theology is historically embedded. Demonstrations for the existence of God are a personal and communal philosophical achievement, and they were achieved through a prehistory of progress from the confused materialistic philosophies of the presocratics to wiser philosophies that acknowledged the existence of substances separated from matter (*Sententia Super Metaphysicam* Bk I; *Treatise on Separate Substances* c.1–3). For Aquinas, natural theology is not the work of Cartesian egos but actual historical figures working in a philosophical tradition.

Natural theology is limited in two ways. First, we can know that God exists but not what God is (*ST* I q.2 a.2 ad 3 and q.12 a.12 ad 1; *SCG* lib. I c. 14). Whatever we predicate of God falls far short of communicating his simple unbounded perfection. Second, words do not mean the same thing when predicated of God as when predicated of creatures. All our talk about God is limited to analogical predication (*ST* I q.13). Recognition of these limits is a mark of true philosophical wisdom about God. The wisest natural theologies, though giving some true knowledge of God, serve also to educate us in our ignorance of God—to remind us how little we know of God, and how mysterious he is. Even with the most robust natural theology, we are united to God as to one unknown (*ST* I q.12 a.13 ad 1) and Aquinas even says the best way to know God is by this unknowing way (*Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum* d.8 q.1 a. ad 4). Jean Pierre-Torell sees in Aquinas's apophaticism a deep intellectual honesty about the transcendence of God and an ascesis of excessive mental ambitions (Torell 2003: Ch. 2). One may also see in it an openness of natural theology itself to a knowledge of God beyond natural theology. Perhaps one could also see in it an anticipation of modern critiques of rationalist metaphysics, or even a point of contact with those critiques.

Natural theology is demonstrative. Contemporary readers of Aquinas differ over whether he thought the arguments of natural theology were demonstrative or probabilistic, and also over whether the demonstrations have in fact been accomplished or are still awaiting final elaboration. It seems clear that for Aquinas there are demonstrations for the existence of God and not just probabilistic arguments, and that at least some pagan philosophers have already arrived at such demonstrations. He makes this point when bringing to light a crucial distinction:

> There is a twofold mode of truth in what we profess about God. Some truths about God exceed all the ability of human reason. Such is the truth that God is triune. But there are some truths which natural reason also is able to reach. Such are that God exists, that He is one, and other such things. In fact, such truths about God the philosophers proved demonstratively, led by the light of natural reason.
>
> (*SCG* lib. I c. 3)

Those truths about God accessible to human reason as such are traditionally called *preambles to* faith, and the truths inaccessible to human reason as such are called *mysteries of* faith. Aquinas explicitly says that some philosophers have demonstrated some of the preambles.

Although the potency for philosophical demonstrations concerning God is found in all humans by virtue of their nature, the actual development of this potency occurs only in a few, that is, the philosophers. Due to the practical necessities of life and uneven distribution of intellectual aptitude, however, it occurs only after a long period of time, and still with an admixture of error in it (*SCG* lib. I c. 4, *Super Boethium De Trinitate* q.3 a.1 resp.). Aquinas does not say that all human beings do some natural theology, or should do some natural theology, before making an act of faith in God. Instead, he affirms that 'faith presupposes some natural knowledge of God' (*ST* I q.2 a.2 ad 1), but the knowledge that faith presupposes is not always natural theology. It is most often the general and confused knowledge of God, for Aquinas says that natural theology is for the few, after a long time, etc.

Furthermore, the development of natural theology either individually or communally faces difficulties in our fallen condition. In addition to being limited by time, practical necessities, and uneven intellectual aptitudes for it, the development of natural theology is also impeded by various sinful traits of fallen human beings. Although the human speculative intellect is not simply obliterated by the Fall, and remains fundamentally capable of truth, Aquinas has an impressive list of sinful cognitive acts and vicious cognitive habits. Presumption, rash judgement or levity, folly, and manifold forms of imprudence are paradigmatic instances of moral and epistemic vice. In fact, all vices distort the perception of what is good, but some vices result in particular distortions bearing directly on God. Acedia causes one to be saddened at spiritual goods. Lust brings with it aversion from God and hatred of the supernatural. Pride makes one seem and feel independent of God. Disobedience makes one rebel against God. And idolatry is worshipping something other than God. In addition to the limits of natural theology inherent in the human intellect, time, and the practical necessities of life, these common moral faults serve also to impede the full flowering of natural theology in the human race.

For Aquinas, the conclusions of natural theology can be taken on faith (*ST* I q.2 a.2 ad 1). If the ancient world presented many obstacles to doing natural theology, what shall we say of the contemporary post-metaphysical, positivistic, and scientistic cultural milieu? In such a context, where natural theology is commonly perceived as impossible, or at best essentially probabilistic, and in which the educational system does not promote or cultivate habits of natural theology, perhaps most believers fall back on their pre-philosophical knowledge of God and faith.

Given the context of a fallen creation, and the blight of our many epistemic defects, it may seem that our natural capacities to know God are doomed to frustration. For Aquinas, however, God remedies our bleak situation by giving a second degree of illumination beyond that of natural reason.

## Divine Revelation

Divine revelation is a special process by which God elevates and capacitates human beings for knowledge of God beyond all our natural capacities. In divine revelation, God chooses certain people, the prophets and apostles, and enhances their cognition by endowing their intellect with a higher intellectual light called ‘prophetic light’ (*lumen propheticum*). By virtue of the prophetic light they can see more deeply into experience than human beings can see by the light of natural reason alone. Whether with respect to an ordinary experience, such as the prophet Jeremiah looking out over the city of Jerusalem, or an extraordinary experience, such as Moses looking at the burning bush, these people see in that experience what God wishes them to know about himself or some related matter due to the light of prophecy. Jeremiah sees in the everyday marketplaces of Jerusalem a violation of the covenant. Moses sees in the burning bush the command to lead Israel out of slavery. The chosen recipients of prophetic light then put into words or deeds what they have seen in the prophetic light. Their speech is God’s testimony in the sense that it comes from the judgements they have made in the prophetic light. God also commonly confirms the divine origin of their testimony by signs, wonders, miracles, etc. Finally, the truths put forth by the prophets and apostles are then consigned to scripture (also by cognitively enhanced or ‘inspired’ authors of the books of the Bible), and the Bible is composed.

On this account, to know God by divine revelation belongs, properly speaking, to those who have received the prophetic light, that is, prophets, apostles, and inspired authors. To these chosen recipients God speaks to us of what will fulfil us, namely himself. For God is the 'end of all our actions and desires' (*ST* II–II q.4 a.3 ad 3). But only some people are direct recipients of divine revelation. What about everyone else? In the same revelation, Aquinas thinks, God tells everyone who is not the direct recipient of divine revelation how to receive God, namely, by faith.

## Faith

Aquinas analyses faith in terms of the object, act, and virtue of faith. The object of faith is of some*one* (God) and of some*thing* (a truth that one believes; *ST* II–II q.129 a.6). The object of faith is God being personal with us, revealing himself, and summoning us to trust him for the truth of what he says of himself. The object of faith is the 'first truth [God himself] as manifested in Scripture and the teaching of the Church' (*ST* II–II q.5 a.3). Scripture is not simply passive information but living and dynamic words (Stump 1994: 161–97). Furthermore, the living words of preachers or witnesses, who proclaim as divine revelation the message found in scripture as the church understands it, also manifest God or the first truth (*ST* II–II q.6 a.1; *SCG* lib. I c. 6). Confirmatory signs accompany the preaching. Although Aquinas most often names miracles as confirmatory signs, he also lists other signs: the church as a miraculous or quasi-miraculous entity (*SCG* lib. I c. 6 and *De Articulis Fidei* Prol.); the preacher's way of life (*Super Romanos* c. 15 L.2); the preacher's works of virtue (*Super 1 ad Corinthios* c.2 L.1); and the profound wisdom of the message itself (*SCG* lib. IV c. 54 n. 1). Scripture and preaching are both shot through with and surrounded by such signs that give weight to the preacher's announcement. Through scripture, preaching, and signs together, God presents to us what will make us perfectly happy, namely himself, and makes an appeal for faith in him and his word to us. The appeal is simultaneously both external and internal to the listener. The words of scripture and preaching outwardly appeal for faith, but, more importantly, God inwardly invites the person to believe. God interiorly inclines the heart of the listener from their interior. An interior instinct or inspiration of the Spirit prompts the listener in conscience to believe in God as manifested by the words of scripture, preaching, and the accompanying signs. Thus, those of us who are not immediate recipients of divine revelation receive the phenomenon of the living words of scripture and preaching, pervaded by confirmatory signs, telling us of God who is our happiness now appealing to us to believe in him and his words, as we find ourselves profoundly inclined to believe in him and his words. Such, in phenomenological terms, is the object of faith.

To believe, then, is 'an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God' (*ST* II–II q.2 a.9). The believer affirms what is heard (i.e. makes a judgement that *p*) and has no fear that not-*p* even though the believer does not *see* that *p* (*ST* II–II q. a.4). The proposition that *p* is not self-evident or deducible from self-evident principles. The believer affirms that *p* by an act of the will moving the intellect to assent. The question of great epistemological concern is why the believer wills to assent.

In a question on whether demons have faith (*ST* II–II q.5 a.2), Aquinas considers that someone could will to affirm that *p* because of all the confirmatory signs that go with the preaching of it as God's own word. Seeing the signs accompanying the preaching, one could conclude that it is God's word that *p*, for example, Jesus is Lord. Having concluded it is God's word that *p*, one could then will to affirm that *p* in response to perceived truth indicators that *p*. This is the way in which demons believe: by willing to affirm in response to perceived truth indicators. And perhaps a human being could too. But Aquinas explicitly denies that this is the way in which Christians believe. He says: 'belief is predicated equivocally of those who believe and of the demons' (*Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* q.14 a.9 ad 4). Instead of being willing to affirm what is heard in response to perceived truth indicators, Christians will to affirm what is heard 'from the ordering of the will to the good' (*ST* II–II q.5 a.2).

The question of why the believer wills to affirm what is heard is a question of *moral knowledge* or how one knows whether to do something. Aquinas recognizes two types of moral knowledge. One type is arrived at through a theoretical grasp of moral principles or inference from such principles. For example, one can know that *I ought to return this extra change to the cashier* by grasping the abstract principle that one ought to render to each person his or her due, and applying that principle to the particular case of this exchange of goods for cash here and now. Such a way of arriving at the judgement that I ought to return this extra change to the cashier would be psychologically complex. It would require numerous distinctions and inferences, but it could be done. Another type is arrived at through inclination. If the virtue of justice shapes a person's will, then the person's will is inclined to render to each his or her due. When faced with a question of what to do, the just person can often find the true answer simply by consulting his or her own will to justice. Upon so consulting the will to justice, the person spontaneously, non-inferentially, intuitively, and correctly judges *I ought to return this change to the cashier*. Such a way of knowing what to do is not by theorizing about what is good, but by *being* good. This latter form of knowing is sometimes called connatural knowledge or knowledge by inclination or moral intuition, and it is pertinent to the act of faith.

The person confronted with the object of faith is simultaneously summoned by it. The listening person is inwardly inclined to believe what has been heard, and to take God's word for it. This very inclination serves to illuminate what I ought to do here and now, and gives birth to a spontaneous, non-inferential, intuitive judgement that *I should believe this*. When I hear that God has revealed certain things, I do not see either *that* God revealed them or *what* God allegedly revealed. But, Aquinas says, I do see that I should believe both that and what God revealed (*ST* II–II q.1 a.4 ad 2, 3 and a.5 ad 1). I see this by connatural knowledge.

What role, then, is there for confirmatory signs? Signs have a place in Aquinas's account of faith. He appeals to them in response to the charge that it is foolish to believe mysteries beyond human reason (*SCG* lib. I c. 6), when addressing the plurality of competing revelation claims that are set before people (*SCG* lib. I c. 6), and in response to medieval versions of the evidentialist objection (*ST* II–II q.2 a.9 obj. 3). Signs accordingly lend weight to the testimony of preachers (*ST* II–II q.178 a.1 resp., *SCG* lib. III c. 154). Human beings *can* study such evidence, and *can* construct an argument that God revealed the mysteries of Christian faith. Such considerations, in contemporary terms, would not be the basis on which one believes but mere confirmation or corroboration. Signs provide propositional but not doxastic justification for the faith. Aquinas's appeal to signs is a dialectical move within his own epistemic context, so it is not an attempt to respond to the 'critical problem' and the 'problem of enthusiasm' raised in later centuries.

With respect to modern questions concerning the epistemological justification of faith, various points in Aquinas suggest that he would take a position if not against then at least different from evidentialists. 'Miracles lessen the merit of faith insofar as those are shown to be hard of heart who are unwilling to believe what is proved from Scriptures unless they are convinced by miracles' (*ST* III q.43 a.1 ad 3). And 'they who are so ready to believe God, even without beholding signs, are blessed in comparison with them who do not believe except that they see the like' (*ST* III q.55 a.5 ad 3). And, further, 'those who believe on account of teaching (*doctrina*) are more commendable, because they are more spiritual, than those who believe on account of signs, which are grosser and on the level of sense' (*Super Ioannem* c.2 L.3, n.418). Disbelief is sinful, Aquinas explains, not because one resists the evidence, but because one resists an inner instinct to believe (*ST* II–II q.10 a.1 ad 1). God gives signs, and they are useful for a variety of epistemic purposes, including responding to sceptics and evidentialist objections. But Aquinas nowhere affirms that rationality as such requires each believer actually to consider the signs, and Aquinas's texts suggest there may be some circumstances in which it can be better to believe without them.

To say that faith is a virtue is to say that believers are the kind of persons disposed simply to trust God for the truth of what is put forward in scripture and in the teaching of the church (Anscombe 2008). Their disposition to trust God thus makes it easy for them to believe invisible mysteries without fear of error. For every virtue has an inclination for its act, and so by the virtue of faith the person is inclined to believe. In this way, the virtue of faith and its inclination to believe comprise a stable light that makes a believer to see how right it is to believe 'even though many reprehend him for having gone out of his senses and for being a fool and a madman' (*Super de Divinis Nominibus* c.7 L. 5).

## Mystical Wisdom

When God endows a person with grace, faith is but one of the higher ways of knowing God. With grace also come other virtues, as well as the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. Charity is chief among the virtues, and Aquinas defines it as friendship with God, describing this friendship as a communication to a person of God's own happiness and indeed God himself (*ST* II–II q.23 a.1, q.28 a.1). Several gifts of the Holy Spirit, furthermore, are cognitive in nature. The Holy Spirit operating through the gift of understanding moves a person to fathom (in a way beyond natural understanding but similar to it) the mysteries believed in faith (*ST* II–II q.8). The Holy Spirit operating through the gift of knowledge moves a person to estimate the true worth of created goods in light of divine eternity (*ST* II–II q.9). Through the gift of counsel one receives instructions on what to do in matters beyond what can be determined by reason illuminated by faith (*ST* II–II q.52). Most importantly of all, through the gift of wisdom the Holy Spirit gives a person an experiential or spiritual taste of God, and moves the person to judge of things through this personal affinity with God (*ST* II–II q.45). The one moved by the Spirit of wisdom sees all things with the eyes of God. Finally, God also gives the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc. Each of these fruits is clearly experiential (*ST* I–II q.70). All of the baptized have all of these virtues, gifts, and fruits, though the Spirit operates through them differently in the lives of different people.

The point of enumerating the virtue of charity as well as the gifts and fruits of the Spirit is to point out Aquinas's bigger cognitive picture of Christian life. Grace has many effects in a person. Faith is one of them, but there are others. And among the others, many of them are cognitive and experiential. Thomists both old and new have pointed out how these felt effects of grace amount to something like a lived experience of God or 'quasi-experimental' knowledge. Contemporary epistemologists are interested in this lived experience, and here is how Yves Congar has described it:

> By 'experience', I mean our perception of the reality of God as he comes to us, is active in us and operates through us, drawing us to him in communication and friendship, as one being exists for the other. This experience falls short of vision and does not do away with the distance that we are aware of in our knowledge of God himself, but overcomes it at the level of a presence of God in us as the beloved end of our life, a presence that makes itself felt in signs and in the effects of peace, joy, certainty, consolation, enlightenment and all that goes with love. The experience that the great mystics have described is a special and indeed exceptional degree of this perception of a presence of God who is given to us so that we can 'enjoy' his presence as a living object of knowledge and love. On this side of what is exceptional, there is what is ordinary—our experience of God's presence and activity in the appeals and signs that occur in our prayer, our practice of the sacraments of faith, the life of the church, and the love of God and neighbour.
>
> (Congar 1983: xvii–xviii)

Faith is not simply blind. It gives the believing person access to this new, supernatural kind of life and cognition. In the strict sense of the term, mystical wisdom is the Spirit's gift of wisdom. In a broader sense, however, mystical wisdom is the whole lived experience of the grace of God who leads us into knowing and loving him.

## Theological Wisdom

For Aquinas, wisdom generally speaking is a cognition of the first principles of reality as a whole. Since God is the first principle of reality as a whole, and since the cognition of God can take several forms, we can differentiate various types of wisdom. In philosophical wisdom, one knows God by philosophical argumentation about his existence and attributes. In mystical wisdom, one knows God by a savoury experiential taste of his presence, and is led into intimacy with him.

Philosophical wisdom proceeds from a studious application of natural intelligence. Mystical wisdom proceeds from the grace of the Holy Spirit modifying and elevating a human being to operate in a manner beyond the capacities of human nature. Theological wisdom is like mystical wisdom inasmuch as theology begins from the grace of receiving divine revelation through faith, but it is like philosophical wisdom inasmuch as theology proceeds from a studious application of one's natural intelligence to what is believed in faith. The believer *as human* has a natural desire to understand what he or she believes *by the grace of faith*. When a believer studiously applies his or her natural intelligence in ordinary human ways, and attempts deeply and systematically to understand what he or she believes by faith, the result is theology or theological wisdom. Aquinas sees theological wisdom in light of a larger mystery called *sacra doctrina* (or holy teaching).

*Sacra doctrina* is a theological mystery that Aquinas believes in by faith (*ST* I q.1). The mystery is that of the communication of God's own knowledge to humanity. *Sacra doctrina* is at once God's knowledge of himself, the knowledge that the blessed in heaven enjoy as they see God, the knowledge communicated to humanity through divine revelation, the knowledge consigned to scripture, the knowledge received (inchoately) in faith, the knowledge arrived at more deeply by theological inquiry, and the knowledge communicated still further to humanity by preaching and teaching. On a Dionysian reading of *Summa Theologiae* I q.1, one can say that *sacra doctrina* is a theological mystery of cascading light coming down from God and the blessed to the recipients of divine revelation, and through the scriptures to theologians, preachers, and teachers who by their proper acts in turn hand it on to the faithful.

An Aristotelian reading of *Summa Theologiae* I q.1 gives us more epistemological details. God's own self-knowledge enjoys the highest possible epistemic status (*scientia*). When God's knowledge is received by humans in faith, even though the faithful lack vision of what they have learned from God, what they believe does not lose the positive epistemic status it has in God. It remains knowledge (*scientia*), but with the qualification that in the faithful this knowledge is subalternated to or is a sharing in what is originally and primarily still God's knowledge. God's knowledge, being received by faith, is open to human modes of study, penetration by human intelligence, and elaboration in argumentative forms. It is a true wisdom since it is a grasping (by an intelligent faith or faithful intelligence) of the first principle of reality as a whole manifested through divine revelation. This wisdom has first principles (the articles of the Apostles' Creed), and defends those principles by refuting objections on rational grounds. It uses or incorporates philosophical arguments for some of its fundamental presuppositions (e.g. the existence of God). All of this is tied intricately to the primary task of interpreting or understanding the message of scripture and preaching or teaching it.

## Beatific Vision

Higher than the natural light of reason, as well as the lights of prophecy and the light of faith, higher than both theological and mystical wisdom, the most perfect way of knowing God is through the beatific vision. The beatific vision is an intellectual seeing, possessed by those in heaven, of the divine essence. To see God is complete happiness. Such intellectual vision is the third and highest degree of illumination that God confers upon a person, and the light that makes one see God is called the light of glory. Obviously, it is very difficult for us to determine the properties of such cognition, so Aquinas says very little on it. In one respect, the light of glory is a created habit, since God modifies and enhances the intellectual power of human nature thereby capacitating us to see him. In another respect, the light of glory is God himself, who is seen by the intellect so modified. Since, for Aquinas, knower and known are the same in act, one who knows God in some sense is God. By the light of glory the human being is 'made deiform' (*ST* I q.12 a.5 ad 3).

# CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a brief account of the various ways of knowing God that Aquinas presents. It calls into question those who reduce the thought of Aquinas to the project of natural theological argumentation for God's existence and attributes (as some Christian apologists answering to scepticism may be inclined to do) or dismiss him as someone who failed to prioritize divine revelation in theology (as some theologians have accused Aquinas of doing). 'The task of the wise human being', Aquinas says, 'is to put all things in order' (*SCG* lib. I c. 1). If that is true, then it falls to the epistemology of theology to put in order *all* the many ways of knowing God.

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## CHAPTER 27

# JOHN DUNS SCOTUS

### SCOTT M. WILLIAMS

Duns Scotus (1265–1308 CE) is an epistemological pluralist; he holds that there are several goals for the epistemology of theology: logical consistency, certainty, truth, and right praxis. In what follows I discuss how he aims for these goals within his accounts of the natural knowledge of God, faith and supernatural knowledge of God, and the connection between the epistemology of theology and right praxis.

## Natural Knowledge of God

Scotus usually talks about the natural knowledge of God within the context of answering the question of 'whether God is naturally cognizable by the intellect of a wayfarer' (Scotus 1954: 1; 1960: 223). What Scotus understands this question to be asking is this: 'Can a human being in the state of original sin think of God if God does not uniquely intervene in bringing about this person's thought about God?' Scotus affirms that such a human being can think of God in this way.

What is the best explanation of this situation? Scotus's 'doctrine of univocity' is the shorthand name for his account of how such a human being can come to think about God in this way. What a person might think about God in this situation is another issue (e.g. 'God loves creatures', 'God is wise'). Scotus is optimistic that we can come to think important truths about God 'naturally'. He maintains that I can 'naturally' think about God and in turn develop arguments to show that, for example, God exists and is infinite, numerically one, a knower and a willer. Metaphysics is the discipline in which we arrive at such natural knowledge of God. What can be known about God in metaphysics is limited to what is naturally knowable about God, and theology can claim to know more about God because of God's self-revelation.

Scotus famously argues that for us to think about God as such, whether in metaphysics or theology, there must be some concepts that are applicable both to God and to creatures. To a large extent, Scotus develops his position in response to Henry of Ghent's theory of analogy and Richard of Conington's defence of Henry's position (Brown and Dumont 1989: 7–12). Nonetheless, Scotus also offers criticism against the common view of analogy that claims to be necessary for natural or supernatural cognition of God.

Scotus, like almost all his contemporaries, is committed to the metaphysical position that God and creatures are primarily diverse from each other. God transcends creatures such that they have nothing really in common (Ghent 1953: 124; Duns Scotus 1956: 190). Scotus agrees with Thomas Aquinas that we can make true affirmations and negations about God as such. If we can make true negations about God (e.g. 'God is not dead'), then this presupposes that we have some sort of positive knowledge of God, e.g. 'God is good' (Cross 2005: 258–9). Further, positive knowledge of God is required for one's loving God. Scotus says, 'negations are not the object of our highest love' (Scotus 1954: 5). We must have some positive knowledge of God, however general or obscure, because Christians do in fact love God.

According to the 'common view of analogy', the concept of being is centrally important for our knowledge of God (Brown 1965; Dumont 1987, 1988, 1998). The concept of being primarily refers to God (who is 'being itself'), and a derivative but connected concept of being refers to creatures. There is not one concept of being that refers to God and to creatures. Instead, there are two distinct but related concepts of being. The 'analogical community' between these two concepts is based upon creatures' causal dependence on God.

Henry of Ghent finds the 'common view of analogy' insufficient because the analogical community is also epistemic. Henry posits the clarification that the 'community of analogy' is an intellectual confusion. When a human person thinks 'being' he might mistakenly assume that this concept refers to God and to creatures. But this would imply that there is something really in common between God and creatures. Instead, one is confused in virtue of having two similar concepts of being. The concept referring to God is negatively undetermined and indeterminable. The concept referring to creatures is privatively undetermined and determinable.

Scotus gives as many as ten objections against Henry's solution to the basis for the 'community of analogy'. I discuss the most powerful: the argument from certainty and doubt. Henry claimed that when we think 'being'—as merely undetermined—we are confused and doubtful as to whether we are actually thinking the concept of 'being' as negatively or privatively undetermined. Scotus replies that Henry's position is contradictory. Henry says that we are *doubtful* of what we think when thinking 'being' (whether we are thinking 'being' as negatively or privatively undetermined) *and* that we are *certain* of what we think when thinking either one of these concepts. In short, Henry claims that we are doubtful and certain of the very same concept. This is a contradiction. Scotus puts his argument in a syllogism:

> [Premise 1] An intellect certain about one concept but doubtful about others, has a concept about which it is certain that is different from the concepts about which it is doubtful.
>
> [Premise 2] We can be certain that God is a being, but doubt whether God is infinite or finite being, created or uncreated.

> [Conclusion] Therefore, the concept of being is different from the concept of infinite being and finite being, and so [does not include or imply finitude or infinity] of itself and it is asserted of each of these. Hence, [the concept of being is] univocal.
>
> (Scotus 1954: 18; I have slightly altered Dumont's translation 2003: 308)

Scotus infers that we do in fact have a concept of being that is not identical to the concept of 'infinite being' (or 'uncreated being') or 'finite being' (or 'created being'). In another text he describes the concept of being as 'that to which existence (*esse*) is not repugnant' (Frank and Wolter 1995: 179 n. 27). Scotus gives a de facto argument for the second premise (Scotus 1954: 18–19).

Scotus claims that this abstract concept of being is a simple concept—an atomic concept (Scotus 1956: 182–3). This simple concept is in contrast to the complex concepts 'infinite being' and 'finite being'. These complex concepts are made up of the simple concept of being and a concept of an intrinsic mode (infinite, finite). A concept of an intrinsic mode is a concept of a certain degree of intensity of some reality (e.g. being, whiteness). Finite degrees of 'being' can be proportionally measured like the number four is twice that of two. Some creatures (e.g. angels) have a higher degree of existing than other creatures (e.g. rocks). But the infinite degree of being wholly exceeds all finite degrees such that there is no measurable proportion between them (Frank and Wolter 1995: 151–5; Dumont 1987: 12–13). Scotus argues that a 'mode' does not add a new reality, but instead it determines a certain degree of intensity of that reality. Consequently, the same simple concept of being is a constituent of the complex concept 'infinite being' and the complex concept 'finite being'.

The relation between the concept of 'being' as it is in 'infinite being' and as it is in 'finite being' is the relation of univocity (Dumont 1987: 5 n. 10; Cross 2012: 150–1). The same simple concept is a part of different complex concepts. The relation of univocity is a semantic relation and not an extra-mental real relation. Univocity is not a relation between a concept and an extra-mental thing, or between one thing (e.g. God) and another thing (e.g. creatures). Furthermore, the semantic relation between the complex concepts of 'infinite being' and 'finite being' is analogy. The relation of analogy here is between transcendental concepts and not between categorial concepts like 'animal' (a genus) and 'human' (a species). A transcendental concept is irreducible to any categorial concept. On Scotus's account of analogy it is false to claim that a human being as human is analogous to God, but true to claim that a finite being is analogous to an infinite being.

Scotus agrees with the traditional view that creatures participate in God and understands this to mean that every creature causally depends on God. Scotus's doctrine of univocity is compatible with the claim that creatures are analogical to God. Moreover, this doctrine of univocal concepts explains, and defends our having, analogical concepts for God and creatures. Regrettably, some contemporary writers have not acknowledged this fact about Scotus's doctrine of univocity (Deleuze 1996: 37–9; Boulnois 1999: 290–1).

Scotus claims that if his own theory is false, then this will be the ruin of theology as a discipline that makes deductive arguments (Scotus 1960: 266–7; Cross 2005: 252–3). Without the doctrine of univocity, metaphysicians and theologians would commit the fallacy of equivocation in their deductive arguments about God. But Christian thinkers, going back to the patristic era, have made deductive arguments about God. Consequently, metaphysicians and theologians ought to agree with the doctrine of univocity—that there are *some* univocal concepts applicable to God and to creatures.

There have been three common exegetical mistakes about Scotus's doctrine of univocity. The first has been to confuse the *reference* of the simple concept of being. One way to confuse the reference of this concept is to claim that for Scotus the simple concept of being is both a first intention (i.e. a concept referring to an extra-mental item) and a second intention (i.e. a concept referring to another concept).

Frederick Copleston, in trying to synthesize two inconsistent texts of Scotus, mistakenly posited that this simple concept of being is a first and second intention (Copleston 1962: 230–1). Without the benefit of having the critical editions of Scotus's texts, Copleston did not know that Scotus changed his mind on this issue of the univocal concept of being between the time of his early philosophical texts (in which the simple concept of being is a second intention) and his later theological texts (in which the simple concept of being is a first intention). Copleston tried to reconcile these texts by postulating that this concept of being is a first intention and a second intention (Marrone 1983; Pini 2005). Boulnois makes a similar mistake in describing Scotus's doctrine of univocity as 'logical univocity' (Boulnois 1999: 290–1).

In later texts Scotus is explicit that this simple concept of being is a first intention rather than a second intention, and he circumscribes its reference (Scotus 1956: 221–7):

> It should be noted how a certain first intention of A [e.g. God] and B [e.g. creatures] is indifferent and corresponds to nothing of one feature in reality, but the formal objects [e.g. God and creatures] are understood to be primarily diverse, in one first intention, although each imperfectly.
>
> (Scotus 1956: 221)

Recent commentators have helpfully expressed Scotus's claim about reference by saying that God and creatures fall under the *extension* of the same concept despite their being ontologically primarily diverse (Pini 2002: 178–9; Cross 2005: 251, 256; Williams 2005: 578).

The second mistake, by Gilles Deleuze, is to infer *from* the concept's semantic univocity *to* the ontological univocity of its referents. Deleuze mentions that Scotus says that the concept of being is univocal, but then overlooks the centrality of the univocity of the *concept* of being and instead speaks of 'univocal being' and claims 'all *things* [are] divided up within being, in the univocity of simple presence'. The univocal concept of being refers to things (i.e. God and creatures) with 'univoc[al] … presence' (Deleuze, 1996: 37). However, when Scotus says, 'there is nothing of one feature in reality', what he is denying is the inference from semantic univocity to ontological univocity, which is exactly the inference that Deleuze makes.

The third mistake, by Oliver Boulnois, is to claim that the doctrine of univocity implies the denial of analogy between God and creatures. Boulnois claims that for

Scotus analogy between concepts of God and creatures is impossible, and that only univocity or equivocity is possible (Boulnois 1999: 290–1). Boulnois overlooks what Scotus says of the semantic relation of analogy between complex transcendental concepts like 'infinite being' and 'finite being'. This is unfortunate for many reasons, not the least of which is a fatal distortion of a vital resource for the contemplation of God. One might say that Scotus's univocal concepts are like the first step on Jacob's ladder towards God, and his analogous concepts are like all the subsequent elevatory steps towards God. For, 'every act of the intellect that stretches out towards God as its object is simply more perfect than an act of intellect concerning something created' (Scotus 1639: 515).

Certain contemporary writers (e.g. Milbank, Gregory, and Pickstock) who depend on Copleston or Deleuze or Boulnois have been misled and disseminate these mistakes. Milbank, who follows Deleuze through Rose, recapitulates Deleuze's mistake (Rose 1984: 103–5; Milbank 2006: viii, 304–5). Gregory, following Milbank, disseminates this mistake when speaking of Scotus's 'univocal metaphysics' (Gregory 2012: 36–8). Pickstock makes Deleuze's mistake in the first half of the following sentence and Boulnois's version of Copleston's in the second half (by conflating a logical description of a concept with the first intention concept itself): 'Every existing *thing*, whether finite or infinite, is univocal *in quid*, where being is taken to mean an essential "not not-being" ' (Pickstock 2005a: 568, emphasis added). When challenged about these mistakes Pickstock says on two occasions that she is unwilling to defend her exegesis 'with regard to specific texts', in order to maintain a broad historical narrative that Scotus's doctrine of univocity was bad for theology and society in general (Pickstock 2005a: 570 n. 2, 2005b: 319 n. 2. See also Cross 2001; Williams, 2005). Like Deleuze, Boulnois, and Milbank, Pickstock denies that Scotus has a doctrine of analogy that is not reducible to univocity or equivocity (Pickstock 2005b: 284). She contends that disagreement about Scotus's doctrine of univocity is evaluative and not exegetical. However, this is a red herring.

These exegetical mistakes are not new. These are but the most recent iterations of a misrepresentation of Scotus that goes at least as far back as Joseph Kleutgen's 1860 history of medieval philosophy, *Philosophie der Vorzeit* (Inglis 1997: 31, 1998: 96–100). Nonetheless, theologians like David Bentley Hart have called attention to Milbank's and others' exegetical mistakes (Hart 2003: 41 n. 6, 61). Clearly, more work needs to be done on the historiography of Scotus's doctrine of univocity going all the way back to the fourteenth century in order to expose any long-standing misrepresentations of it.

## Supernatural Knowledge of God and Faith

Scotus maintains that God's transcendence limits what we can naturally know about God. If we naturally know God, then we know God under general descriptions and not as *this* God in particular. One way that Scotus describes God's transcendence is to say that this God is not a cognizable object like any other. Unlike all other cognizable objects, a creature thinks of this God only if this God wills that this creature think of this God. This is called supernatural cognition of God. Scotus mentions some of the articles of the Christian faith (e.g. that God is three and one, that God the Son became incarnate in the womb of Mary, that God will resurrect the dead) as examples of when a person supernaturally thinks of God.

Scotus distinguishes five ways that a person might have a supernatural cognition of God (Scotus 2004b: 68–9). The first way is the beatific vision, which God gives to the blessed in heaven. A person directly 'sees' (i.e. thinks of) *this God* as existing here and now without need of an 'intelligible species'. An 'intelligible species' is an intellectual disposition that bears mental content, and is a partial efficient cause of one's thinking of a certain extra-mental object. Scotus agrees with Henry of Ghent's analogy from *seeing* an object to *thinking* of an object as existing and present. Henry calls this type of thinking 'vision', and Scotus calls it 'intuitive cognition'. In contrast to vision or intuitive cognition, Henry calls thinking distinctly of an object without thinking of the object as existing and present, 'understanding' and Scotus calls it 'abstractive cognition' (Dumont 1989: 592–3). Abstractive cognition entails thinking of an extra-mental object in part by means of an 'intelligible species' such that the cognized object is not experienced as existing here and now. There is a difference between 'seeing' Rome, in part by means of Rome itself, and 'seeing' Rome, in part by means of an 'intelligible species'.

The second way in which one might cognize this God supernaturally is if this God causes a person to have an abstractive cognition of this God such that the person thinks of this God distinctly, but does not experience this God as existing here and now. A person with this abstractive cognition is unwilling to doubt the truth of what she thinks. One could doubt but usually chooses not to doubt. The third way is much like the second except in this case God impedes the person (e.g. prophets, apostles) with this abstractive cognition from being able to doubt what she thinks of this God.

The fourth way is through biblical exegesis, which corrects misunderstandings of Holy Scripture. Scotus adds that elders in the church are engaged in this activity and aim to resolve any doubts that a person has about things said in Holy Scripture about this God.

The fifth way is an act of faith whereby a person believes those things that are necessary for salvation (i.e. the articles of faith). Elsewhere Scotus discusses 'whether among things revealed to us it is necessary to posit infused faith'. Scotus distinguishes between faith that is acquired through learning—whether studying Holy Scripture or hearing the scriptures being preached—and an infused faith that God freely gives to a person.

Scotus describes faith as a 'generated habit that inclines to something not evident of itself as to [something] true, and with this determination, that one assents to that as true' (Scotus 2004a: 119). It is a habit, namely a quality that inheres in a substance. Someone with acquired faith is more certain than someone with an opinion because the person with this faith *trusts the veracity of the witness giving testimony*. The veracity of a witness depends upon its good reputation; if the witness has a good reputation, then you should trust that witness. Scotus claims that Holy Scripture, the saints, and the church each have a good reputation and so should be trusted. Someone today with critical historiographical concerns might disagree with Scotus by supposing that claims made in the Bible have less veracity. Still, Scotus would be concerned that one rightly understand the scriptures before making a judgement about their veracity.

Scotus's examples of acquired faith are not limited to theological examples but include everyday examples (e.g. I believe those who claim to be my parents; I believe that the world existed for a long time before I existed; I believe that Rome is a real place even though I have not seen it). Acquired faith, however, is not as certain as scientific knowledge because science has evidence from the object itself (Scotus 2004a: 102–3).

Anyone can have acquired faith if he or she participates in the life of the church. Someone who is not baptized (and without infused faith, discussed below) can nevertheless learn what the baptized learn through studying and hearing scripture. Moreover, such a person can believe the same things that the baptized believe (Scotus 2004a: 101–2).

Scotus believes that infused faith differs in three ways from acquired faith. First, God causes a person to have infused faith that inclines the person to believe God and what is true of God. Like acquired faith, infused faith is a habit and not a mental representation; it does not bear mental content. A person with infused or acquired faith comes to have mental representations ('intelligible species') of the articles of faith by learning what is to be believed through studying the scriptures and being taught the articles of faith by the elders of the church or both.

The second difference has to do with certainty as a subjective conviction. A person with acquired faith can waver in believing the veracity of the one giving testimony and so waver in believing that the articles of faith are true. Such a person can waver because it is possible for the one giving testimony to be deceived or to deceive. But the person with infused faith is inclined to believe what is in fact true of God. Scotus considers the case of when the Apostles (before receiving infused faith) asked Jesus, 'Lord, increase our faith' (Lk. 17:5). Scotus argues that if an act of believing the articles of faith are true were merely caused by a person's will, then the Apostles would not have asked Jesus to increase their faith. Scotus concludes that believing the articles of faith to be true is not merely a matter of willpower. Infused faith explains why some believers do not waver in believing God and the truths of God and are willing to risk martyrdom. By contrast, theologians without infused faith might be less willing to risk martyrdom (Scotus 2004b: 63).

The third difference has to do with the dispositional well-being of a person who has been harmed by original sin. Scotus believes that God is a perfect healer such that God not only chooses to heal a person's body (especially in the resurrection), but also begins the task of healing the person's intellect and will in this life. God begins healing the intellect by giving the gift of infused faith. God's accepting a person as justified (forgiven) from sin partially depends upon a person's infused faith. Likewise, God gives the gift of love, namely an infused habit in the will that inclines one to love God firmly and passionately (Scotus 2004b: 74–5).

Having described acquired faith and infused faith, Scotus asks a question about both types of faith: 'Can I know [i.e. have demonstrative knowledge] that I have the true faith?' (Scotus 1639: 514–5). If the answer were yes, then it would follow that such a person has demonstrative knowledge that what he believes is true. But, claims Scotus, believers do not have demonstrative knowledge of the articles of faith. Consequently, a believer does not know that she has faith that is true. Nevertheless, she can know that she has faith by inferring from her own acts of faith to her habit of faith, and she can believe that she has faith that is true.

A person with infused faith is unwavering in her commitment to the truth of her faith. Scotus makes sense of this by analysing the object of infused faith, which is the truth of God and not something *as revealed* by God (Scotus 1639: 511–13). If one were to claim that one believes an article of faith only because God reveals it, then an infinite regress would ensue. Is it also revealed that the articles of faith are revealed by God, and so on? Scotus avoids the infinite regress by saying that he simply believes the articles of faith. Two such articles of faith are that God reveals the articles of faith, and that God gives infused faith. Given his characterization of infused faith, one could plausibly argue that Scotus's view of infused faith as an intellectual inclination to believe something without recourse to inferences from evidence is similar to Alvin Plantinga's 'properly basic beliefs' insofar as basicality is concerned (Plantinga 2009):

> I say that it is necessary to posit infused faith because of the authority of Scripture and of the saints, but it cannot be demonstrated to belong to someone, unless it is presupposed by faith that he wills to believe Scripture and the saints (but it never will be shown to the non-believer). But just as I believe that God is three and one, so I believe that I have infused faith by which I believe this ….
>
> (Scotus 2004a: 115)

Scotus trusts the veracity of Holy Scripture and the saints and learns about infused faith from them—he gets his mental representation ('intelligible species') of infused faith from them. He learns that his unwavering trust in their veracity derives from his infused faith. In sum, one's infused faith and education from Holy Scripture, the church, and saints about infused faith are mutually supportive.

## 3. Epistemology of Theology and Theological Praxis

Scotus suggests that the epistemology of theology ought also to be understood as a part of a theological praxis, namely a life of loving God. Nicholas Lobkowisz claims that 'Scotus seems to have been the first medieval thinker explicitly to ask the question, "What is a praxis?" … in a philosophical and theological context' (Lobkowisz 1967: 71). After explaining Scotus's account of theology as an explanatory science, I discuss his account of praxis and some of its implications for the epistemology of theology.

Scotus distinguishes between theology as such and our theology (Scotus 1950: 95–6, 102, 109–14). The former is God's self-knowledge. The latter is knowledge of God as *this* God to the extent that God freely reveals Godself to individual persons who in turn can bear witness to others about God. Theologians, generally, are those whom God has gifted with distinct abstractive knowledge of this God, or this God's actions, or both. For example, theologians can construct explanations of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the resurrection of the dead.

Scotus is adamant that abstractive knowledge of God is a gift given for God's purposes. A person has abstractive knowledge of this God 'not … through study, but it is rather a free gift given for the utility of the church, and Christ has known when it was useful to give that gift and to whom, as to the Apostles and to the Prophets' (Scotus 2004b: 68). A theologian can receive any number of distinct abstractive concepts of God, but a theologian ought not to presume to have definitive or exhaustive abstractive knowledge of God; for a theologian has 'participated' knowledge of this God and so cognizes this God neither directly nor exhaustively (Scotus 2004b: 67–8).

Scotus argues that 'theology is a gift distinct from faith, but not so perfect that it makes for perfect and distinct knowledge based on the evidence of the object as is the case with science, and nevertheless it is simply more perfect than any acquired science and any faith' (Scotus 2004b: 73). A theologian's abstractive cognition is more perfect than faith in the sense that a theologian has distinct concepts of this God *and* that these distinct concepts are put in an explanatory order. A theologian could doubt what she thinks of God, including her inferences from one claim to another. By contrast, a person with faith alone believes the articles of faith taught in Holy Scripture, has less clear concepts of God than the theologian, and does not make inferences from one claim to another in order to believe what is taught (Scotus 2004b: 62).

A theologian makes arguments that satisfy three out of the four conditions for a *propter quid* demonstration. A *propter quid* demonstration requires premises that are certain, necessary, self-evident, and explanatory of the conclusion. Scotus concedes that a theologian can have premises that are certain, necessary, and explanatory of the conclusion but denies that such premises are self-evident (i.e. from the object itself). Richard Cross discusses this in talking about a supposed demonstration of the Trinity:

> The claim, then, that the proofs of the Trinity are not demonstrations simply means that they are not based on premises that have the strong degree of *evidence* (i.e. either inferential underivability or empirical undeniability) required for a demonstration. … The premises are necessary but derivable. So the proof will be strongly deductive, though not demonstrative in the strict sense.
>
> (Cross 2005: 128–9, emphasis in original)

Since theology satisfies only three out of four conditions for a science, it is not a science strictly speaking. Nonetheless, if we use the term 'science' loosely so as to require premises that are certain, necessary, and explanatory, then theology is a deductive science. But why suppose that distinct concepts of God can be put in an explanatory order? According to

Scotus's 'famous proposition', a theologian's distinct concepts of God can be explanatorily ordered. He argues that there is an essential or per se order between quidditative terms (e.g. intellect, will, thought, volition) whether or not we consider these as concepts in a mind or as extra-mental items. The essential order among quidditative items as indifferent to being in the mind or in reality is important: it enables Scotus to argue that a theologian can have explanatorily ordered concepts of God (Cross 2005: 107–14) He argues that:

> Premise 1 Where the *per se* basis for an order remains the same, the order remains the same.
>
> Premise 2 The *per se* basis for order remains the same whether those things are distinct really or by reason.
>
> Conclusion Therefore, the order remains the same for things whether distinct really or by reason.
>
> (Dumont 1992: 419)

If this argument is logically sound, then theologians are justified in claiming to have explanatorily ordered concepts of God. A theologian might argue that God's simplicity is explanatorily prior to God's immutability. Scotus says, 'simplicity seems to be followed by immutability because what is simple cannot be moved or corrupted' (Scotus 2004b: 45 n. 104).

Scotus's defence of theology as a deductive science faces several challenges, one of which is the compatibility of theological science and faith in the same person (Scotus 2004a: 144). Scotus denies that infused faith and science *taken strictly* are compatible in the same person because the former does not have evidence from the object but the latter does. Nonetheless, infused faith and theology are compatible in the same person because both are certain and do not have evidence from the object itself (that is, the object is not self-evident). In a later text Scotus distinguishes between habits and occurrent acts, and claims that contrary or contradictory intellectual habits are compatible in the same person, but not contradictory occurrent thoughts (Scotus 1639: 520, 2004b: 61–3). I can have one habit inclining me to affirm an *unclear* claim about the Trinity (e.g. God is triune) and another habit inclining me to affirm a *clear* claim about the Trinity (e.g. there are three divine persons but only one divine essence). But I cannot simultaneously have unclear and clear occurrent thoughts about the Trinity. Hence, theology and infused faith are compatible in the same person.

Scotus's overall position is noteworthy. A person can be a rigorous theologian (even without science taken strictly) and have steadfast faith. Scotus adds that a person can have a steadfast and passionate love for God while doing rigorous theology (Scotus 2004a: 74–5). The connection between theology, faith, and love is key. The epistemology of theology is a part of the praxis of loving God. He defines praxis as follows:

> Praxis, to which practical cognition extends, is the act of a faculty other than the intellect which, by its very nature, is posterior to an intellection and can be elicited in conformity to right intellection so as to become right.
>
> (Scotus 1950: 155; I have slightly altered Lobkowicz's translation 1967: 72)

Praxis is an act of will necessarily posterior to an act of intellect and conforms to an act of intellect (Scotus 1950: 179–83). Suppose I come to understand the (supposed) necessary truth, 'God is the most lovable object', and infer 'God must be loved'. Scotus claims that both thoughts are speculative as such. Nonetheless, these thoughts can be called practical thoughts because each has a twofold aptitude towards an act of will. Such a thought is apt to being prior to an act of will, and it is apt to be conformed to an act of will. The use of the term 'conformal' amounts to saying that there is an agreement between an act of intellect and an act of will. For example, one's act of loving God agrees with the thought 'God must be loved'.

Furthermore, praxis is righteous if it is conformal to a 'right intellection'. For example, the act of loving God is always righteous because the claim that 'God must be loved' is a necessary truth. However, in the case of (supposed) contingent truths that I think about (e.g. 'Adore God in the sacrifice of the altar'), I can have an act of will that agrees with this thought but is not righteous. The righteousness of this praxis depends upon God's current covenant with humankind as revealed in Holy Scripture.

There are two immediate consequences from Scotus's account of the relation between the epistemology of theology and theological praxis. First, a person can have true thoughts of God but fail to grasp the twofold aptitude of one's thoughts for right praxis. Second, a person can fail to elicit an act of will (i.e. an act of love) that agrees with a true thought of God (e.g. 'God must be loved'). If one does not grasp the twofold aptitude of one's thoughts of God for one's own act of loving God, then one may fail to appreciate the practical significance of one's thoughts of God.

* * *

Why should epistemology be concerned with theology and with God in particular? Scotus says that philosophers are concerned with what is naturally knowable—they bracket off supernatural beliefs. However, philosophers often come to dilemmas that cannot be resolved by natural reason alone. Scotus calls this philosophical dilemma 'nature's fitting insufficiency' (Frank 2012: 53–63). This dilemma is a fitting insufficiency because Scotus believes he can offer persuasive theological arguments (i.e. *propter quid* arguments without self-evident premises) that answer such dilemmas. For example, Scotus argues, 'A human being cannot know from natural things his [or her] end distinctly; therefore, it is necessary for him [or her] to obtain supernatural cognition of this end' (Scotus 1950: 10). Scotus argues that just as natural ethics is insufficient in its own terms, so too is natural epistemology insufficient in its own terms. If Scotus is persuasive, then the epistemology of theology should be seen as a necessary part of epistemology and theological praxis.

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## CHAPTER 28

# RICHARD HOOKER

A. S. MCGRADE

In his massive *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Richard Hooker (1554–1600) sought to justify the religious laws of late Elizabethan England to the whole world, in the face of intense Puritan opposition to nearly everything about them. The *Laws* is the first substantial contribution to theology, philosophy, and political thought written in English, and a landmark for Anglophone cultural identity. This chapter will look for epistemic goods at different levels and in different areas of the *Laws*, with the hope of conveying a sense of Hooker's whole apologetic effort. I will first briefly consider his fundamental conceptions of God and law and then his treatment of three epistemic sources often regarded as distinctive of Anglicanism: scripture, tradition, and reason (see Neelands in McGrade, ed. 1997: 75–94). I will also point out three areas of Hooker's thought that are relevant to the epistemology of theology.

## Hooker's Conception of God and Divine Law

In various contexts Hooker works with different and differently sourced ideas of God. Early in Book I of the *Laws*, a survey of law in all its varieties, he devoutly acknowledges the specifically Christian doctrine of God as Father, Son, and Spirit but declares that the internal operations of the Trinity are outside his present purpose (I.2.2. Book, chapter, and section references to the *Laws* are as in Hooker 1978–1998 and 2013; quotations from Hooker 2013). Discussing the natural world and its laws in the following chapters of his survey, he works with the idea of God as a first cause, which he finds in 'wise and learned' ancient thinkers. Here Hooker makes an important and controversial observation: his sources have not otherwise spoken of that first cause 'than as an Agent, which knowing what and why it works, observes in working a most exact order or law'. They all agree that '*counsel* is used, *reason* followed, a *way* observed, that is to say, constant *order* and *law* is kept' (I.2.3, emphasis in original). Hooker cites scripture to confirm that God acts, not only according to his own will, but '*the counsel of his own will*' (I.2.5, citing Eph. 1:11, emphasis in original). He does not pretend to understand the reason for every act of God, but he rejects as erroneous the assertion that, 'of the will of God to do this or that, there is no reason besides his will' (I.2.5). The claim that God acts for reasons, not by will only, is important for Hooker's use of scripture and supports his identification of reason as the law of our human nature, a law that directs us to imitate God (I.5).

The source of all laws is eternal law rooted in the very being of God himself. Hooker distinguishes between two eternal laws, one freely imposed by God on himself which governs his own external works, the other set down by God to be kept by all his creatures, embodied in their natures as he has created them (I.2.6–3.1). An effect of this distinction is to give 'reasonable' creatures a degree of autonomy in their natural activities on earth; scope for exercising their reason. Only the law God has set for himself is made without any superior, strictly speaking, but within the created order there are important examples of 'laws' that are not imposed by a superior (a feature of his conception of law that Hooker calls to our attention at I.3.1). In making promises, for example, individuals impose laws of a kind on themselves, and we, as a body politic, may make laws for ourselves.

The preceding ideas of God and law have important epistemic implications. The God who acts for reasons in creating a lawful natural world is a model for humanity to use its freedom and intelligence in forming an ordered, flourishing human world. Hooker's dense survey of all the kinds of laws in Book I also provides a significant epistemic good in itself, namely the realization that discovering what is 'lawful' can be much more complicated than Puritans and others typically recognize. Hooker's respect for the wide range of laws which rightly guide our actions is a general warrant for his care to apply each in its own place and consider their frequent interactions, including the mutually supportive interactions of scripture, tradition, and reason.

## Sources of Theology

### Scripture

In accordance with the English Thirty-nine Articles of Religion authoritatively issued in 1563, Hooker held that all things necessary to salvation are contained in scripture. On this point he actually cites, not the Article itself, but Duns Scotus, a medieval thinker highly respected among Roman Catholics (I.14.1). With this double warrant for the sufficiency of scripture for its end, he engages in Book II of the *Laws* with Thomas Cartwright, a leading Puritan controversialist, who wanted scripture to do much more than this. Cartwright maintained that every action in this life, even picking up a straw, required specific scriptural warrant. He saw scripture as the necessary and sufficient basis not only for salvation but for all human activity. Hooker argues against this, partly by challenging Cartwright's interpretation of scriptural texts alleged to show the Bible's omnicompetence, partly by citing texts showing scripture's own endorsement of using reason and common sense, and partly by disputing Cartwright's claims to support from such respected authorities as the early church fathers. Cartwright conceded that natural human reason had been of some use before the Christian revelation but denied that it was of any use in directing our lives after it. Hooker conceded that some of the church fathers were suspicious of reason in the form of Greek philosophy but contended that others among them loved philosophy and taught that good philosophy was the proper response to any anti-religious implications of bad philosophy.

Hooker's dispute with Cartwright and his own defence of a role for natural human reason in theology is highly relevant to any attempt to use a sacred text alone as sufficient foundation for personal theology, conduct, and communal life. The realization that scripture neither claims to provide, nor in practice can provide, a particular warrant for every act of ordinary life has an important epistemic implication, namely that scripture does not provide a formal epistemological theory of warrant. Such a realization also leads to the conclusion that reason is an important resource for discerning how to read scripture theologically and philosophically. In fact, not employing reason would be a failure to function as God created us to do. Thus, any attempt to make scripture the sole and complete rule of life makes it 'a snare and a torment to weak consciences, filling them with infinite perplexities, scrupulosities, doubts insoluble, and extreme despairs' (II.8.6).

Hooker faced an important question about his own position on the sufficiency of scripture for salvation. Belief in doctrines such as the Trinity, the coeternity of the Son of God with the Father, and the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son was acknowledged throughout the Western church to be necessary for salvation. Where are they found in scripture? Nowhere, Hooker concedes, 'by express literal mention', but they are deduced from scripture 'by collection' (I.14.2). An impressive example of such collection is Hooker's vivid and densely sourced exposition of the incarnation and related doctrines in Book V of the *Laws*, Chapters 50–6. These chapters have been praised as 'perhaps the most remarkable piece of theological writing in English literature' (Hooker 1902: cviii). What Hooker's effort here and other collections show is that the creeds, emerging from early church councils, reflect the beliefs of early Christians. The creeds are consonant with scripture but not reducible to it as the only source.

Hooker, who had served for a time as deputy professor of Hebrew at Oxford, was a close interpreter of scripture. His characteristic approach is shaped by his conviction, as we have seen, that God acts for reasons. He finds in scripture many 'natural or rational' laws, directives that always bind in virtue of their inherent reasonableness (I.12). He is also concerned with 'positive' laws, which bind only after they have been explicitly and intentionally imposed, such as promises, the vows we make to God, the laws of particular commonwealths, and positive laws imposed by God (I.15). Hooker holds that positive laws made with regard to specific circumstances may be changed if the circumstances change or if the law is no longer effective in achieving the end for which it was instituted. He applies this principle even to laws made by God (I.15.3). Accordingly, if the reason God imposed a law can be discerned in the scriptural record, that law may no longer be binding. It is wrong-headed to appeal to positive laws to govern circumstances only remotely similar to those for which God imposed them. Hooker applies these views extensively in the final chapters of Book III of the *Laws*, with a concluding review of divine commandments found in scripture—a review which finds considerable variety in the circumstances and continuing authority of different scriptural commands (III.11). This exercise is similar on the social and political level to Hooker's campaign against Cartwright's hyper-scripturalism with regard to individual life. His conclusion regarding the limited use of scripture for precise directives in social and political life is an important epistemic good. Its practical implications correspond with those emerging from the earlier dispute: freedom from stress and encouragement to use reason. A Christian society, in the sense of a society that Christians in later times could support or seek to achieve, cannot be set up simply from direct quotation of scripture. The force of scripture is very great for Hooker (there is reason to suppose he thought public scripture readings were a form of preaching superior to many Puritan sermons), but his understanding of scripture allowed for other sources of guidance in our lives, as long as those do not contradict scripture.

Given scripture's authority for Hooker, we may ask what he saw as the basis for that authority; what justified using scripture as a major warrant in theology. Hooker does not in the end provide a specific answer, but he does raise the question and go some distance in discussing it. He asks what assures us that scripture is the word of God. It cannot be scripture itself, he argues (II.4.2), thus rejecting immediate reader response as a sufficient basis for accepting its divine authority. He later (III.8.14) notes that those of us brought up in the church are first moved to assurance about scripture's authority by the authority of the church itself and that afterwards, as we engage in reading and hearing it, 'the more we find that the thing itself does answer our received opinion concerning it'. But if unbelievers or atheists call our confidence into question, we have occasion 'to sift what reason there is, whereby the testimony of the church concerning scripture, and our own persuasion which scripture itself has confirmed may be proved a truth infallible'. This was the situation in which the early church fathers, constrained to show 'what warrant they had so much to rely upon the scriptures, endeavoured still to maintain the authority of the books of God by arguments such as unbelievers themselves must needs think reasonable if they judged thereof as they should'. Hooker does not offer such argument himself, but he sees no difficulty on the point. 'Neither is it a thing impossible or greatly hard, even by such kind of proofs so to manifest and clear that point, that no man living may be able to deny it, without denying some apparent principle such as all men acknowledge to be true.' This is a strong claim. Readers may wish that Hooker had directed them to one or another of the arguments he had in mind, or to specific patristic texts. The problem left in Hooker's own account is to identify the difference between a first reading of scripture by itself, entirely on one's own, the reaction to which has no warranting force in his view, and an engaged reading beginning from some assurance based on the church's testimony. In another place, Hooker ascribes a cognitive capacity to godliness or piety, comparing the lack of it to a lack of eyesight (V.1.2). Would he suggest that piety in the form of ongoing religious practice enables us to see more in scripture—to see it in a way that warrants its authority? Perhaps Hooker's incompletely resolved treatment of this issue has epistemic value in impelling scripture-centred individuals to see that the question can be raised and to ask whether their own assurance on the matter may come at least partly from their Christian upbringing, not from special spiritual illumination. Hooker certainly thought that what Puritans simply 'saw' in scripture often wasn't there but was an illusion produced by their leaders' teaching (Preface 3.9).

## Tradition

At one point in the *Laws* Hooker finds it necessary to explain the meaning of 'tradition', a term, he observes, that has been and is much abused. In a properly basic sense, Hooker employs the term to mean orders made in the early church by the authority Christ left to it for determining things 'indifferent' (roughly, matters of ceremony and similar practices not prescribed in scripture). These orders are to be observed until the same authority sees good reason to change them (V.65.2). In setting forth criteria for ceremonies in Book V, Hooker treated long-standing usage as a sign of effectiveness in achieving edification, the end intended, although he allows that the church may need to alter traditional ceremonies over time and that, in pressing circumstances, some details of a ceremony may be dispensed with (V.6–9). In his view, most of the ceremonial matters disputed in the English church when he wrote were indeed things indifferent (*adiaphora*), 'for the greatest part such silly things, that very easiness does make them hard to be disputed of in serious manner' (V.Dedication.3).

Nonetheless, Hooker's attachment to the basic form of public common prayer found in 'the liturgies of all ancient churches throughout the world' is very deep. He has no doubt that it proceeded from God (V.25.4). Although he does not note this relationship himself, the spirit motivating his devotion to traditional common prayer seems to be at work in his celebration of the human desire for social connection as a major sustaining force in political association. For Hooker, tradition—connectedness over time—plays an important role in forming and sustaining present community. This kind of emphasis is not motivated by fear of change but rather by love of the community's intellectual, liturgical, and moral coherence.

## Reason

As we have seen, reason helps determine in what sense scripture is authoritative for deriving theological doctrines and ways of living in the world. Scripture, in turn, by including 'natural or rational laws' in its directives, supports reason. Christian tradition, which stretches across the centuries, includes and thus supports respect for both scripture and reason. The special warrant for reason itself is its presence in human nature as created by God (I.5). Hooker's conviction that God himself acts for reasons gives positive value to his characterization of reason as the law of our human nature, which directs us to the 'imitation' of God (I.5).

For Hooker, reason is a cognitive capacity for seeking and recognizing reasons. He compares our knowledge with angelic knowledge. An angel, he thinks, knows from the instant of its creation whatever it can know. In contrast, we start from a condition of 'utter vacuity' (I.6.1). Although he is convinced that the most reasonable course of action in any situation can always be found, if reason is diligent to search it out, his account of 'finding out' specific reasonable principles of action (I.8) is not by a single systematically organized deduction from first principles, but through a variety of helpful suggestions. Hooker is sensitive to the confusion we find in much of our lives, and sympathetic to our frequent failure to resolve it. In all of this he does not regard emotions ('affections' such as joy, grief, fear, and anger) negatively, as inimical to reason or as distractions from it. It is not wholly in our power whether we will be stirred by them, and they are to be controlled by a reasonable will (I.7.3). But control can include cultivation; religious festivals and fasts, for example, are meant to tie joy and grief to appropriate objects (V.70.2, 72.2). In sum, Hooker's conception of reason fits well with our experience of ourselves as creatures in a physical world that presents both appealing opportunities and challenges for understanding and controlling it and ourselves, opportunities and challenges that we meet imperfectly but with some success. Hooker believes that human beings are the worthiest creatures on earth. We may in time become as the angels are in their beginning. But he has a fine sense of our difficulties along the way.

Hooker moves from ethics to politics in Chapter 10 of Book I, and explains how reason leads us to make human laws governing 'political societies', even to laws by which good relations among independent societies may be maintained. In Hooker's account, political societies are formed because as individuals we cannot provide ourselves with the resources for a life befitting human dignity. Two foundations support such association: a natural inclination towards 'sociable life and fellowship' and an agreed order for our living together (I.10.1). Religion appears when the means for life have been secured. The principal actions of a people's life afterward regard their religion (I.10.2, citing Gen. 4:2 and 26). In this picture, political association is a good thing; the means to a decent life and then the practice of religion. The epistemic foundation Hooker provides here for civil or secular thought is both shaped by theological assumptions and is itself a necessary grounding for social and political theology. He does not follow the tradition, associated with Augustine, that regards political association as an unfortunate necessity, with its use of coercion as both a punishment and remedy for sin, but he considers the corruption of our nature by sin a fact that cannot be ignored. Political laws are never framed as they should be, he asserts, 'unless presuming the will of man to be inwardly obstinate, rebellious, and averse from all obedience to the sacred laws of his nature, in a word, unless presuming man to be in regard of his depraved mind little better than a wild beast' (I.10.1). Hooker goes on in this chapter to discuss stages and varieties of political development, primarily the shift from government at the discretion of a ruler to the rule of law. Of fundamental importance is his view that civil government and laws naturally depend for their authority on the consent (original if not immediate) of the governed. Hooker was aptly cited on this point by an American founding father, a Supreme Court justice, in argument against the then fashionable positivist conception of law as essentially the command of a superior (Wilson 2007: 578).

# The Relevance of Hooker for the Epistemology of Theology

## Engaging Others

Hooker's reference to religion as the principal mark of a political society, once the means of *living* have been secured (I.10.2), suggests that religion holds the highest place in a society's attempt to provide for *living well*. This impression is confirmed by his presentation of religion in the following chapter. He argues there that an individual who possessed all the good things of this world would still not be satisfied: 'yet somewhat above and beyond all this there would still be sought and earnestly thirsted for. So that nature even in this life does plainly claim and call for a more divine perfection.' Hooker describes the religious quest as pursued with 'hidden exultation'. What the soul seeks, 'directly it knows not, yet very intentive desire thereof does so incite it, that all other known delights and pleasures are laid aside, they give place to the search of this but only suspected desire' (I.11.4).

Hooker's account of the religious quest as both exultant and mysterious helps explain his tolerance for other churches in Reformation Europe and even other religions in the world at large. The 'rational' Socratic ideal of conversation and communication embracing all humanity is also part of the explanation (I.10.12). In any case, Hooker's breadth of sympathy—by no means the view that any religious doctrine or practice is as good as any other—seems to be an epistemic virtue.

Hooker's open-mindedness was unusual for his time. He saw the religious groups of the Reformation as a plurality of churches, some more sound than others, rather than as one perfect church or viewpoint separated by an unbridgeable chasm from all the others. He held that any body professing one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4:5) was a genuine part of the visible church of Christ (III.1.3–6. It is natural to suppose that he would have considered this threefold criterion the basis for participation in a general council of the church, his preferred means of dealing with the religious conflicts of his time, as at I.10.14). In particular, he took this position with regard to the Roman church, often referred to in Protestant circles as the church of Anti-Christ. In spite of its 'reluctance to be reformed' and what he saw as superstitious in some of its ceremonies (III.1.10), Hooker understood it to be part of the one visible church of Christ extending throughout the world. Indeed, he argued at length that many ceremonies used in the Roman church were not superstitious but acceptable for use in the reformed English church. On the contentious issue of what occurs in the Eucharist he found no scriptural warrant for the doctrines of transubstantiation or consubstantiation but claimed that there was broad agreement on the chief point, the transforming effect of the sacrament in the souls of faithful communicants.

Hooker regarded religious disagreements as important. He took the bitter controversies arising over even small differences in religion as a sign that God has planted in our nature the opinion that everyone ought to embrace the true religion, an opinion which spurs us to search out and maintain 'that religion, from which as to swerve in the least points is error, so the capital enemies thereof God hates as his deadly foes, aliens, and, without repentance, children of endless perdition' (V.1.3). Yet no religion is completely false in Hooker's view, and he believes that sparks of truth in non-Christian religions have had observable benefits in the earthly lives of their adherents. Indeed, he thought that the devout adherent to a false religion was in a better spiritual condition than the pro forma adherent to Christianity:

> They that love the religion which they profess may have failed in choice, but yet they are sure to reap what benefit the same is able to afford, whereas the best and soundest professed by them that bear it not the like affection, yields them, retaining it in that sort, no benefit.
>
> (V.1.3)

Hooker's relative tolerance for the facts of Christian differences and for non-Christian religions gives his energetic defence of the English church something like a halo of humility. For readers sympathetic to the idea that religious truth does not always come easily, Hooker's tolerance will warrant respect as an important epistemic virtue—and a wish that it had been more widely shared when he wrote. For others it may seem to be a form of equivocation and weakness.

## Liturgy and Formation

Hooker is very much concerned with the cultivation of habits warranted, from various sources, as virtues. At a point in the *Laws* where he is using primarily classical sources, he declares that reason, the law of our nature, directs us to imitate God through virtue and wisdom (I.5.3). The classical virtues, such as justice, practical wisdom, courage, and temperance, seem to be meant here. In considering the law of scripture, he eloquently sets out the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. And as a preliminary to discussing public worship, he introduces godliness, or piety (*eusebia*), as the highest virtue, just as God is the highest of all beings (V.1.2, citing Philo Judaeus). For Hooker, godliness is not only the highest virtue in itself; it generates other virtues, including justice, courage, and practical wisdom. The classical virtues and even the virtue of piety are not difficult to take into account in the context of virtue ethics. Hooker's striking presentation of the specifically Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love calls for notice.

These virtues (named at 1 Cor. 13:13) may be of special interest for virtue epistemology in that, as Hooker describes them, they combine present devotion to Christ, under the aspects of truth, goodness, and beauty, with an eschatological perspective leading to the vision of God—a course of Christian spiritual life suggested in a single singular sentence:

> Concerning faith the principal object whereof is that eternal verity which has discovered the treasures of hidden wisdom in Christ; concerning hope the highest object whereof is that everlasting goodness which in Christ does quicken the dead; concerning charity the final object whereof is that incomprehensible beauty which shines in the countenance of Christ the son of the living God; concerning these virtues, the first of which beginning here with a faint apprehension of things not seen, ends with the intuitive vision of God in the world to come; the second beginning here with a trembling expectation of things far removed and as yet but only heard of, ends with real and actual fruition of that which no tongue can express; the third beginning here with a weak inclination of heart towards him whom we are not able to approach, ends with endless union, the mystery whereof is higher than the reach of the thoughts of men; concerning that faith hope and charity without which there can be no salvation; was there ever any mention made saving only in that law which God himself has from heaven revealed?
>
> (I.11.6)

My point in calling attention to Hooker's focus on virtues is to highlight his concern with the development of character, a concern that is easily overlooked if he is thought of simply as working to secure compliance with authorized public worship.

Hooker did indeed regard public worship (see McGrade forthcoming 2017) as supremely valuable, but this was because he saw it as a primary site for honouring God, developing participants' character, and acquiring theological knowledge. He offers an apparently original demonstration that 'there can be in this world no work performed equal to the exercise of true religion, the proper operation of the Church of God' (V.6.1). This is a strong claim for the importance of public worship in and of itself, apart from any liturgical characteristics or civil or ecclesiastical requirement. His premise is that the greatness and inherent worth of an action is measured by the worthiness of the subjects engaging in it and the object with which the action is concerned. Human beings are the worthiest creatures on earth, every society is worthier than any individual within it, and the most excellent society is the church. As to the object of public worship, it is directed towards God, whose greatness and power are infinite and who should be acknowledged 'with unfeigned affection' as above and before all things. Thus, public worship would seem to be epistemically valuable, since it provides an important context for the church's teaching to be presented and because, in publicly honouring God, it deepens virtue-generating piety, which, as we have seen, readies the Christian for that most important of epistemic goods, the eschatological vision of God.

Hooker thought that we have difficulty maintaining cognitive and emotional focus on God and found that many features of the authorized services helped our 'imbecility' in this regard. He is eloquent on the beauty of churches, on dignified services conducted with spirit and with concern for the people's needs, and also on the power of music to assist here (V.25 and 38). The fact that Hooker defends the authorized forms of worship on their merits, not primarily because they are authorized, helps explain their survival in parts of the world where Anglican churches are not 'established'. The forms survive because they continue, at many times and for many worshipers, to serve the ends that Hooker envisioned for public worship, namely honoring God, deepening worshipers' relationship with God, and contributing to their theological knowledge.

## Political and Religious Life

Hooker considers epistemic relations between religion and the civil order from the standpoint of each. On the one hand, he commends religion as highly beneficial to a society's civil life. On the other hand, from the standpoint of religion, he defends the English crown's dominion over the church as an important means of protecting the integrity of Christian belief, life, and worship instead of undermining it as is often assumed. I will consider these two directions of support in turn.

Hooker commends religion to those concerned with civil affairs primarily for the effects godliness or piety has on personal character. These include development of the classical virtues most important for achieving and maintaining a good society, such as justice, courage, and practical wisdom. The union of religion with justice, for example, is so natural, as Hooker sees it, 'that we may boldly deny there is either, where both are not' (V.1.2). This relationship holds, he goes on to say, not only for those in positions of authority; it inspires all men of action with zeal to do good as far as their circumstances permit. The result Hooker envisions is the promotion of widespread, active, and intelligent virtue, motivated by Christian piety, not sheeplike compliance with whatever the civil law happens to demand. Hooker also extols the church's contribution to a society's flourishing. A proper ordering of values puts the moral and spiritual above the material. When, with the church's encouragement, this order is generally respected in a society, even if not perfectly practised, that society will be better able to prosper, for it will not regard worldly prosperity as the ultimate human goal and destroy itself with obsessive greed. Religion, then, is epistemically valuable for civil society not only because it teaches individuals and leaders how to live but also because it is through such living that individuals might come to a deeper sense of what kind of prosperity is really worth pursuing.

The eighth and final book of the *Laws* completes Hooker's attempt to persuade not only Puritans but the whole world that English laws for religion (including the royal supremacy, forms of worship authorized in the Book of Common Prayer, and the immediate governance of the church by bishops) support the authentic practice of Christianity rather than conflicting with it. Appropriately, Hooker sought to provide two epistemic goods concerning supreme civil authority: an awareness of its natural basis in reasoned human choice rather than direct divine appointment (VIII.3.1) and a demonstration that religion and politics cannot be separated (VIII.1). The first of these is mainly of historical interest, as there are few advocates of the divine right of kings today. But the second deserves attention, for it challenges the desirability, or even the possibility, of what many regard as a political ideal: a wall of separation between church and state. In Hooker's terms, a church and a commonwealth differ in nature, but in England, when he wrote, the persons who made them up were identical. Every subject of the crown was nominally a member of the English church. To pretend, therefore, that there could be supreme civil and religious authorities wholly independent of one another in this situation was fundamentally incoherent. In modern societies it is rare for all citizens to belong to the same religious community, but Hooker's point holds good nonetheless. Every one of us has both a civil identity (marked, for example, by a passport or driver's licence) and a religious or spiritual identity (marked by group membership, individual belief, opposition to religious belief, etc.). The fact that each of us has both a civil and a spiritual identity is a blessing but also a potentially serious problem. The personal inseparability of religion and politics, in the sense that citizens of, for example, the United States are the same persons who have a particular assortment of religious or spiritual characteristics, is a blessing because it is the basis for seeking a happy relationship between the two—a relationship, for example, in which religion contributes substantially to the well-being of civil society while civil law and administration protect religion. This was the situation approximated (very roughly) in Hooker's presentation of the relations between church and commonwealth in Elizabethan England. Dual civic and spiritual identities can become a problem when we act as if only one of the two has any claim on us. If truth is an epistemic good, however, Hooker deserves our thanks for his view of civil authority as naturally dependent on reasoned human choice, and for his focus on the 'personal' inseparability of religion and politics.

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## CHAPTER 29

# TERESA OF ÁVILA

STEVEN PAYNE

Among the historical figures presented in Part III of this book, Teresa of Ávila stands out as the only woman, and the one with the most limited formal academic training, given the restrictions on women's education in her day. Though she has been recognized as a 'Doctor of the Church', previous epistemological attention to her work has often suffered from a somewhat narrow focus on certain themes, as well as a failure to appreciate adequately the circumstances and purpose of her writings. Here, following a short note on her context, I will briefly review how Teresa's words have been invoked in previous debates on certain aspects of religious knowledge, before passing on to some suggestions about other ways in which she could contribute to contemporary discussions in the epistemology of theology.

## Preliminary Note

Teresa de Ahumada y Cepeda—better known as Teresa of Jesus (according to her religious name) or Teresa of Ávila (according to her family home)—was raised within the devout Catholic environment of the Spanish 'Golden Age'. In 1535, at the age of 20, she entered the large and busy Carmelite monastery of the Incarnation in Ávila, and later began practising 'recollection', a popular form of quiet and focused prayer in which 'the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God' (*W* 28.4).[1] But a serious health breakdown, feelings of unworthiness, and poor spiritual guidance led to what she would later consider a long period of mediocrity, until she underwent a kind of 'second conversion' in 1554 at the age of thirty-nine. She subsequently rededicated herself to meditation and contemplative prayer and began having unusual religious experiences, including ecstasies and visions, which confessors and advisors initially warned could be the work of the devil. To clarify her experiences to herself and the religious authorities, and later to help guide others, she began writing extensively on prayer and spirituality, in a series of texts that have come to be regarded as classics of Western mysticism. During the same period she felt called to inaugurate a 'reform' among the Carmelite nuns and friars, and founded numerous 'discalced' Carmelite monasteries, intended to be small communities of 'friends' supporting each other in a life of contemplation and unceasing prayer for the sake of the church and world. She died in 1582, was canonized in 1622, and in 1970 became the first woman officially designated as a 'Doctor of the Church'.

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[1] In this chapter Teresa's texts are cited by 'dwelling places' (for *The Interior Castle*), chapter, and section number, since these are usually standardized across different editions and translations whereas page numbers may vary. The following abbreviations are used: *C* = *The Interior Castle; L* = *The Book of Her Life; T* = *Spiritual Testimonies*; and *W* = *The Way of Perfection*. Thus, for example, a reference to '*C* 7.4.6' refers to the sixth section of the fourth chapter of the 'seventh dwelling places' in *The Interior Castle*.

Contemporary Teresian scholarship has shown that Teresa's social and cultural setting provides a crucial interpretive key to her works, even when she is treating the loftiest spiritual (including epistemological) themes (see Egido 1980; Bilinkoff 1989; Weber 1990; Ahlgren 1996; Garrigan 2009). As Rowan Williams has observed, she wrote with an awareness of her vulnerability, 'as a woman and [a person of Jewish ancestry] undergoing ecstatic experiences, and claiming certain kinds of authority, at a time when any one of these would have guaranteed her not being taken seriously in church and society, except as a threat and a pollutant' (Williams 1991: 37). This background helps explain, in part, her keen sensitivity to the moral and cognitive distortion caused by a preoccupation with 'honour' and social position; her frequently self-denigrating remarks about women's intellectual abilities coupled with a vigorous defence of their capacity for a deeper spiritual life; her willingness to explore profound theological truths while at the same time stressing her lack of scholarly training and vocabulary; and her often-repeated praise of 'learning' and the 'learned' theologians, despite the fact that they were often highly critical of 'espirituales' like herself. She was attempting to map out stages and experiences in the spiritual journey that she had not found adequately described elsewhere, and did so without benefit of technical terminology. Moreover, her thoughts were constantly evolving and her perspective changing as she grew spiritually. Readers can be easily confused if they assume, for example, that her understanding of 'recollection' and 'prayer of union' remained the same throughout her writings.

Finally, like others of her milieu, Teresa simply took for granted the general reliability of sense perception, the reality of God and Satan, the inspiration of the Bible, the teaching authority of the church, and the truth of her Catholic faith. Her goal as an author was not to resolve philosophical issues but to give 'with complete clarity and truthfulness' (*L* Prologue) an account of her own spiritual journey, to offer guidance to others, and to 'sing the mercies of God' that she had personally experienced. Certainly in the course of her writing she addressed many themes related to theological epistemology—growth in self-knowledge, the cognitive dimension of mystical union, the role of various virtues—but to interpret her texts accurately it helps to know at what point she was writing, to whom, for what reason, in what genre, with what presuppositions, and so on.

## TERESA AMONG THE EPISTEMOLOGISTS

From their first publication in 1588, Teresa's writings caught the attention of a wide reading public, including many philosophers and theologians. Older Catholic treatises on 'mystical theology' frequently cited Teresa in developing their taxonomies of mystical states. But, with the growing compartmentalization of theological studies in the West, the spiritual testimonies of mystics such as Teresa were thought to have little significance for systematic theology.

Teresa reappeared within the broader academic arena with the revival of interest in mysticism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly within the emerging discipline of the psychology of religion. Among twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophers, Teresa is often cited in discussions of whether mystical states are 'everywhere the same', whether those of Christian mystics might be phenomenologically theistic or merely described as such, and whether these experiences provide support for belief in the existence of God ('argument from religious experience'). Thus, Teresa's name has been invoked in discussions of what criteria, if any, can be used to assess the veridicality of mystical experiences.

C. B. Martin (1959), Ronald Hepburn (1967), William Rowe (1982), and others have argued that mystical states lack cognitive value on the grounds that such experiences do not satisfy the normal standards of testability expected of perception-like experiences if they are to be counted as genuinely cognitive. William Wainwright counters that 'the nature of an object should (at least partly) determine the tests for its presence' (Wainwright 1981: 94), and that consequently it is appropriate to judge the veridicality of alleged mystical encounters with God (as Teresa does) by such standards as the positive moral effects on the mystic and others, conformity with scripture and orthodoxy, the judgement of the church, and other criteria quite different from those used for assessing for sensory experiences. Drawing extensively on Teresa's descriptions of her experiences of God and their effects, William Alston makes a similar point in more detail, and argues 'that the experiential awareness of God, or as I shall be saying, the perception of God, makes an important contribution to the grounds of religious belief' (Alston 1991: 1). Mavrodes, on the other hand, comparing Teresa's anxieties about demonic deception with Cartesian doubt, has argued that Teresa 'cannot have a criterion for determining whether [the devil] is deceiving her', but he 'leaves open the possibility that she might in some other way come to a knowledge of the truth' (Mavrodes 1978: 255). In fact, he acknowledges that Teresa at times may be making a rather different point, namely that her mystical experiences were so compelling that she herself could not doubt them.

In short, Anglo-American philosophers of past decades have referred to Teresa primarily in the context of their own concerns about the nature of mystical experience and its universality, whether alleged experiences of God provide evidence of God's existence or justification for religious beliefs, and so on—concerns not shared by St Teresa, at least not in the same way. Of course, as Grace Jantzen has pointed out, 'from the fact that modern philosophers ask questions different from those asked by the mystics themselves, it does not follow that modern philosophers are wrong to do so'. Yet Jantzen argues that their tendency, following William James (1985), to define mysticism in terms of a 'secret inner life' and intense subjective states, 'far from being a neutral, objective account, … is an account inextricably intertwined with issues of power and gender' (Jantzen 1995: 327, 346) which tends to marginalize women's voices and ignore the broader implications of mysticism as it was understood in previous ages.

Indeed, for a variety of reasons, many Anglo-American philosophers of religion have become dissatisfied with the somewhat limited approach to mysticism in terms of the evidence or support religious experience provides for faith claims. Similarly, many epistemologists are moving beyond traditional debates on the role of justification in knowledge to consider a broader range of epistemological topics and approaches. And many contemporary theologians now argue for 'the fundamental complementarity of mystical thought and theological endeavour', seeing mystics such as Teresa as offering a certain experiential access to the same theological truths they study, a 'perception of the same mysteries, only from different perspectives' (McIntosh 1998: 33; see also Thompson 1987). With such developments in mind, what might Teresa contribute to religious epistemology beyond the particular question of the evidential value of mystical experiences? Though her contributions are many, here we will limit ourselves to three major points of potential significance for theologians and the discipline of theology: the epistemic benefits of the moral and spiritual virtues she encourages; the transformation of the epistemic subject through the process of spiritual growth; and the experiential knowledge of theological realities available to those who attain 'spiritual marriage', the goal of the mystical journey.

## The Teresian Virtues

In Teresa's view, 'mental' prayer (that is, any prayer beyond the mere mouthing of words) is fundamentally a matter of cultivating an interpersonal *relationship* rather than inducing isolated moments of interior ecstasy. In a famous definition quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, she writes: 'mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us' (*L* 8.5).

For Teresa, then, the growth in knowledge and understanding that occurs in the spiritual journey flows out of this growing friendship with God. This is not to deny that what Teresa claims we 'come to know' as we advance may have broader significance. She mentions, for example, a time when she came to recognize through an experience of 'union' that 'God was in all things by presence, power, and essence', a 'truth' she confirmed by consulting a learned theologian, though a 'half-learned man' tried to convince her otherwise (cf. *L* 18.13; *C* 5.1.10). Such a truth could have important implications, for example, in the development of a contemporary 'green' theology and spirituality. But for Teresa it is an insight arising out of a profound interpersonal encounter rather than theological argument, even though scripture and theology confirm it. In general, we can say that the growth in 'knowledge' that Teresa describes as we advance in prayer and virtue is best understood and analysed not in terms of learning new objective facts or discovering new doctrines about God and the soul, but in terms of the way friends and lovers come to a deeper mutual knowledge and understanding as their love grows (see *L* 27.10).

Nowhere does Teresa provide a systematic treatment of the moral virtues, still less of epistemic virtues and goods of interest to contemporary epistemologists. Yet virtues in general, and some specific virtues in particular, play a key epistemic role in her teaching. Teresa reasons that if prayer is 'an intimate sharing between friends', and 'in order that love be true and the friendship endure, the wills of the friends must be in accord', then for the friendship to grow we will need to practise those virtues which bring us into conformity with our divine friend (*L* 8.5). Thus one of the most important ways we come to 'know' God more deeply is through the conformity to God's will that growth in virtue brings about.

In *The Way of Perfection,* Teresa discusses at length three 'things that are necessary for those who follow the way of prayer; so necessary that … if [persons] do not possess them, it is impossible for them to be very contemplative' (*W* 4.3). 'The first of these is love for one another; the second is detachment from all created things; the third is true humility, which … is the main practice and embraces all the others' (*W* 4.4).

As this passage suggests, humility and self-knowledge are foundational for Teresa. In the opening pages of the *Interior Castle*, Teresa laments: 'It is a shame and unfortunate that through our own fault we don't understand ourselves or know who we are…. [W]e seldom consider the precious things that can be found in this soul, or who dwells within it, or its high value' (*C* 1.1.2). She recommends that no matter how far we advance we should return often to the 'room of self-knowledge' (*C* 1.2.8). 'To be humble is to walk in truth' (*C* 6.10.7), and this means always remembering who we are before God. On the one hand, we need to be aware of our own sin, weaknesses, limitations, and total dependence on God. On the other hand, to avoid discouragement, she recommends focusing on God's 'grandeur and majesty' rather than our own misery. Authentic humility, therefore, 'does not disturb or disquiet or agitate' but 'comes with peace, delight, and calm' (*W* 39.2). In epistemic terms, without true humility, our perceptions and judgements are easily distorted by pride or self-loathing.

Detachment, according to Teresa, is not simply about mortifying our unruly desires for material goods and sensory pleasures, but includes overcoming our excessive preoccupation with health, relatives, 'honour', and the approval of others, which can blind us to the truth. No longer viewing the world only through the lens of our biases and self-interest, we obtain the inner freedom 'to give ourselves to the All entirely and without reserve' (*W* 8.1).

Finally, regarding love of neighbour, Teresa stresses the importance of good and healthy friendships that can support us as we strive to grow in virtue and the knowledge of God. True friends also help us to avoid error because they do not 'flatter or hide anything from the other' but point out where we have gone astray (see *W* 7.4–9).

These are by no means the only virtues that Teresa considers. For example, she also insists that in setting out on the 'royal road' of prayer we must have 'a great and very resolute determination (*muy determinada determinación*) to persevere until reaching the end, come what may, happen what may, whatever work is involved, whatever criticism arises … or if the whole world collapses' (*W* 21.2). In various contexts she mentions the importance of patience, joy, devotion, wisdom, courage, forgiveness, obedience, holy poverty, and, of course, faith, hope, and charity. These may be considered first of all as moral and religious virtues, but they have epistemic benefits in freeing us from the distorting effects of our own greed and selfishness, fostering calm and balanced judgements and preparing us for the treasures of wisdom and knowledge God wishes to share with us. The qualities mentioned above—determination, a healthy detachment from one's own pride and preconceptions, a humble openness to guidance from a loving faith community concerned about truth, and the others—can equally be seen as epistemic virtues for those engaged in theological reflection. For Teresa, those who follow the 'royal road' she outlines not only advance towards union with God and the fulfilment of their destiny but also develop a clearer and more accurate knowledge of themselves, others, and the world around them.

## Development in the Mystical Life as Spiritual and Epistemic Transformation

In Teresa's view, progress in virtue is but one part of a more comprehensive process of holistic spiritual growth. As noted earlier, philosophical discussions of mysticism have typically focused on analysing brief excerpted passages from mystical authors describing particular extraordinary experiences. Their accounts are treated much as one might treat reports of UFO sightings—that is, by checking for similar reports and other possible explanations, by interrogating the reliability of the witnesses, and so on. Rarely is serious attention given to what is of far greater interest to the mystics themselves: the larger context of the evolving life story within which the particular mystical experience occurs. Yet it would seem to be of epistemological significance that, according to Teresa and others, the process of growing towards union involves not only *new experiences* but also a *progressive transformation of the experiencer* at every level, including the cognitive. 'Teresa of Ávila is telling [us] about a *transformed* epistemic capacity in which affectivity, bodiliness and the traditional mental faculties are in some unique sense (through the long practices of prayer) aligned and made responsive to God' (Coakley 2009: 294, emphasis in original). Indeed, Teresa founded communities of her Carmelite reform precisely to foster such a transformation, through such practices as mutual love and support, balanced asceticism, silence, simplicity, and extended periods of 'mental prayer', to help refocus scattered affective and cognitive energies and attention on God and God's will.

Teresa is widely recognized as among the first authors to try to identify the developmental stages of the spiritual life in such detail, and to describe so minutely the experiences and states of consciousness associated with each. Again and again she attempts to map out the mystical journey, most notably in *The Book of Her Life* and *The Interior Castle*.

In the former, Teresa interrupts the story of her life with a long section on the 'four degrees of prayer', using the comparison of four ways of watering a garden: by drawing water from a well; by using a waterwheel; by irrigation from a river; or by 'a great deal of rain' (*L* 11.7–8). According to this analogy, the garden represents the soul, the garden's owner is God, the flowers are virtues; we are to cultivate these flowers by pulling up the weeds of bad habits and watering the soil with prayer. Beginners need the virtue of 'determination' to turn from distractions and practise 'discursive meditation' (a prayer form typically involving reflection on some Scriptural scene or theme); such efforts are comparable to the laborious process of drawing water from a well. Gradually this exercise gives way to the 'prayer of quiet', in which 'quietude and recollection' are 'clearly felt through the satisfaction and peace bestowed on the soul, along with great contentment and calm and a very gentle delight in the faculties' (*L* 15.1); here less activity is required of the one praying, just as using a waterwheel requires less work of the gardener. The prayer associated with the 'third water by which this garden is irrigated, that is, the water flowing from a river or spring' Teresa calls the 'sleep of the faculties' (*L* 16.1), in which 'the faculties are almost totally united with God but not so absorbed as not to function' (*L* 16.2). The 'fourth water' is what Teresa in this context calls the 'prayer of union', involving a complete absorption of the intellect and other faculties and temporary loss of awareness of the external world. 'I can only say that the soul appears to be joined to God, and there remains such certitude about this union that the soul cannot help believing the truth of it' (*L* 18.14). Teresa admits that this 'understanding by not understanding' (*L* 18.24) is difficult to understand, describe, or explain. Here we find many of the passages cited by the philosophers mentioned earlier, passages that speak of unusual states that seem to involve no concepts, images, or discursive reflection. Yet she insists that this 'union' is not devoid of cognitive content but comes about because all of one's intellectual and volitional capacities have been drawn together and engaged by the divine 'friend', beyond all images. And she often encouraged her 'learned' theologian friends to take up the regular practice of 'mental prayer' in order to attain a deeper personal encounter with the same God they sought to know more indirectly through their theological studies.

This is as far as *The Book of Her Life* goes in mapping the stages of the mystical itinerary towards a transformative loving knowledge of God, although there are hints of further purification and development still to come (see *L* 20.11–13). By the time she was ordered to write *The Interior Castle* a decade later, however, Teresa had reached the full flowering of her mystical life, and was finally able to present what she believed to be a comprehensive overview of the entire spiritual journey. She clarifies, corrects, and expands upon what she had written earlier, this time using the master image of the soul as an enormous castle of 'magnificent beauty' made entirely of diamond or crystal, with seven concentric sets of rooms or 'dwelling places'. One journeys through these rooms to reach the centre, where God dwells like a sun illuminating the whole structure from within, except when the light is blocked by a soul's sinfulness, which 'disturbs' the senses and causes 'blindness' in the faculties (*C* 1.2.4). The light becomes more intense the further one advances, progressively revealing the soul's almost incomprehensible 'sublime dignity' and 'marvelous capacity' for God (*C* 1.1.1). In other words, one feature of spiritual progress is the gradual healing of our cognitive disturbances and blindness towards God, together with the activation of previously unrecognized modes of knowing this 'divine friend'.

'The door of entry to this castle', she writes, 'is prayer and reflection' (*C* 1.1.7). Teresa passes quickly over the first three 'dwelling places', which mainly involve our graced struggle to overcome vices, practise virtue, calm the mind, and persevere in the practice of prayer (thus enhancing epistemic stability). The fourth 'dwelling places' represent a transitional phase to a more 'passive' or 'supernatural' mode of prayer unattainable by our own efforts. At first 'one noticeably senses a gentle drawing inward' (*C* 4.3.3) in which the recollection previously achieved through self-discipline with God's help begins to come unbidden. This gradually evolves into the more clearly contemplative 'prayer of quiet', in which the will remains absorbed in loving God while the mind may wander (see *C* 4.3.8). However, in the 'prayer of union', which characterizes the fifth 'dwelling places', 'all the faculties are asleep' and 'during the time that the union lasts the soul is left as though without its senses, for it has no power to think even if it wants to', and 'it doesn't understand how or what it is it loves' (*C* 5.1.4). Afterwards, the soul remains with the certitude that it truly 'was in God', although 'during the time of this union it neither sees, nor hears, nor understands' in the usual way (*C* 5.1.9).

The longest section of *The Interior Castle* is devoted to the 'sixth dwelling places' where 'spiritual betrothal' takes place (*C* 6.1.1). Here Teresa describes in vivid detail some of the extraordinary experiences that can occur, such as revelations, visions, and raptures. As in *The Book of Her Life*, she invokes the traditional categorization of visions into corporeal, imaginative, and intellectual. Teresa spends little time on the first type, which seem to involve the external senses and which she regards as least trustworthy. With imaginative visions, voices, and so on, although one is aware that the experience is not a normal sensory one, some form or image is involved; this might perhaps be compared to the familiar experience of having a specific melody running through one's mind while realizing that it is not being heard with the ears. In the case of what are perhaps misleadingly called 'intellectual *visions*', however, nothing is actually seen with the physical eyes or the 'eyes of the soul'. Yet according to Teresa the experience is a perception-like encounter and extraordinarily compelling. One simply *knows*, though without fully understanding how one knows. Once again, as in the *Life*, she gives an example from her own experience, when the soul 'will feel Jesus Christ, our Lord, beside it' although 'it does not see Him, either with the eyes of the body or with those of the soul' (*C* 6.8.2; cf. *L* 27.2ff.). She is well aware of the paradoxicality of her description, since even her confessor asks how she could be so certain of the identity of the presence when she admits that she did not actually see anything. Yet during the experience itself she finds herself unable to doubt, and even afterwards remains convinced because such an intellectual vision 'is so certain and leaves so much certitude', and 'brings great interior benefits and effects' such as increased strength, growth in virtue, and continual remembrance of God 'that couldn't be present if the experience were caused by melancholy; nor would the devil produce so much good; nor would the soul go about with such peace and continual desires to please God' (*C* 6.8.3). Elsewhere she writes that when such favours are granted 'the soul sees that in an instant it is wise; the mystery of the Blessed Trinity and other sublime things are so explained that there is no theologian with whom it would not dispute in favor of the truth of these grandeurs' (*L* 27.9). Here, obviously, she is not attempting to furnish evidence in support of a philosophical argument for the existence of God, which both she and the confessor would have taken for granted anyway. Rather, she is countering the suspicions of her critics that this experience comes from the devil or some psychological disturbance, on the grounds that if it did, the effects would not have been so positive.

Moreover, Teresa's descriptions of these intellectual visions seem to show that she is not simply imposing a Christian interpretation on a neutral awareness of 'undifferentiated unity'. In other contexts we are relatively familiar with reports, for example, of 'sensing a malevolent presence in the old house' or 'feeling the spirit of my deceased mother near my sickbed'. Those reporting may be unable to say precisely *why* the presence seemed malevolent rather than benevolent, or *why* the spirit seemed to be one's mother rather than her identical twin, given that they admit not seeing or hearing anything unusual. They may even conclude that the experience was a strange passing illusion. Yet in these cases the sense of a malevolent or maternal presence would seem to be part of the phenomenal character of the experience itself, not merely an interpretation imposed later. Similarly, Teresa clearly recognizes that acknowledging the occurrence of these intellectual visions does not yet settle the question of their veridicality; though the recipient may be entirely convinced, others may not. But her testimony does appear to show that such experiences without the normal sensory or conceptual content can indeed be phenomenologically 'of Christ' or 'of the Trinity'.

Surprisingly, however, after the lengthy treatment of extraordinary experiences in the 'sixth dwelling places', Teresa says that in the 'seventh', where the 'spiritual marriage' takes place, the raptures and ecstasies largely cease (see *C* 7.1.5–6). Instead, 'our good God now desires to remove the scales from the soul's eyes and let it see and understand' (*C* 7.1.6). One has reached a certain psychological and spiritual equilibrium, a stable union with God symbolized by the matrimonial imagery, in which the person is continually aware of a dynamic Trinitarian presence within while being simultaneously 'much more occupied than before with everything pertaining to the service of God' (*C* 7.1.8).

Although she is outlining the 'degrees of prayer' (*L* 11.5; C 7.3.13), Teresa does not intend her description of the stages in the spiritual journey to be interpreted rigidly. She reassures her readers that each journey is in some respects unique and that 'although no more than seven dwelling places were discussed, in each of these there are many others' (*C* Epilogue 3). It should be clear, however, that what Teresa wants her readers to focus on in *The Book of Her Life, The Interior Castle*, and elsewhere is not each unusual experience in isolation but the underlying pattern of development that she believes these experiences help to foster. Generally speaking, the overall movement, in her prayer and life, is from discursive meditation to contemplation, from activity to receptivity, from complexity to simplicity, from inner turmoil to interior peace, from sin to virtue, from feeling far removed from God to being conscious of God's constant presence interiorly and exteriorly, from selfishness to love. In short, just as our cognitive and volitional capacities expand in normal human growth from infancy to adolescence and adulthood, so Teresa teaches that our capacity to experience God's presence in the soul's 'centre' expands and deepens according to the stages of our spiritual growth, as impediments and distractions are overcome and our attention is refocused within.

## COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF 'SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE'

The transformed epistemic abilities that come to full flower in the seventh 'dwelling places' already begin to emerge in earlier stages. Thus as Teresa begins explaining how contemplation gradually 'expands' the soul's capacity for God, she makes a distinction between the 'consolations' (*contentos*) that 'we ourselves acquire through our own meditation and petitions to the Lord, those that proceed from our own nature', and 'spiritual delights' (*gustos*) which are bestowed without our conscious effort and 'expand the heart' (*C* 4.1.4–5). She compares them to two water troughs, one where 'the water comes from far away through many aqueducts and the use of much ingenuity', the other where 'the source of the water is right there, and … the water overflows' (*C* 4.2.3). *Contentos*, obtained through our own efforts and ingenuity, are not essentially different from the kind of joy experienced 'when someone suddenly inherits a great fortune, when we suddenly see a person we love very much; when we succeed in a large and important business matter' (*C* 4.1.4), though what occasions the joy may be something more edifying. The experience of *gustos*, however, is far deeper and more interior and 'swells and expands our whole interior being, producing ineffable blessings' (*C* 4.2.5). In other words, not only does the soul enjoy new experiences, but these experiences also increase its capacity for knowing and loving God, no longer indirectly through reflection on created things but through an increasingly intense direct interpersonal encounter.

Similarly, in the 'fifth dwelling places', Teresa compares the 'prayer of union' to the cocoon in which the silkworm dies, to emerge as a butterfly (*C* 5.2.1–8). The soul too dies, as it were, when the faculties are absorbed in 'union', only to emerge totally transformed. 'Truly, I tell you, the soul doesn't recognize itself.… It sees within itself a desire to praise the Lord; it would want to dissolve and die a thousand deaths for Him.… There are the strongest desires for penance, for solitude, and that all might know God' (*C* 5.2.7).

But the transformation is most evident in the 'spiritual marriage' of the 'seventh dwelling places'. 'This secret union takes place in the very interior center of the soul', where God dwells (C 7.2.3), and 'is like what we have when rain falls from the sky into a river or fount; all is water, for the rain that fell from the heaven cannot be divided or separated from the water of the river' (*C* 7.2.4). The dramatic transitory unions, raptures, and ecstasies of earlier stages, which are so often the focus of popular interest in mysticism, Teresa seems to regard rather as signs of weakness, or as means of purifying and strengthening the soul to receive the more complete and continuous divine self-communication of this culminating stage. 'When the soul arrives here all raptures are taken away' because it 'has found its repose' and 'the Lord has now fortified, enlarged, and made the soul capable' (*C* 7.3.12). Here 'there are almost never any experiences of dryness or interior disturbance of the kind that were present at times in all the other dwelling places, but the soul is almost always in quiet' (*C* 7.3.10; see also *T* 65.1). Most importantly, 'our good God now desires to remove the scales from the soul's eyes and let it see and understand' the presence of the Trinity dwelling within, through a certain participation in the dynamic loving interrelationship of the Divine Persons, overflowing in the act of creation:

> The Most Blessed Trinity, all three Persons, through an intellectual vision, is revealed to it .... [And] through an admirable knowledge the soul understands as a most profound truth that all three Persons are one substance and one power and one knowledge and one God alone. It knows in such a way that what we hold by faith, it understands, we can say, through sight—although the sight is not with the bodily eyes or with the eyes of the soul .... Here all three Persons communicate themselves to it, speak to it, and explain those words of the Lord in the Gospel: that He and the Father and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell with the soul that loves Him and keeps His commandments.... Each day this soul becomes more amazed, for these Persons never seem to leave it any more, but it clearly beholds ... that they are within it.
>
> (*C* 7.1.6–7; see also *T* 59.21–3; 65.9)

Moreover, for Teresa, who has insisted that the humanity of Christ plays an essential role throughout the spiritual journey, this dynamic inner presence of the Trinity also involves the mystery of the Incarnation (cf. *T* 51). According to Edward Howells, 'For Teresa ... mystical union is to be understood as the interiorization of the divine life of the Trinity into a Christ-like self' (Howells 2002: 125). Or as John of the Cross, Teresa's contemporary and collaborator, puts it, those who reach this stage share in the dynamic inner-Trinitarian life and 'possess the same goods by participation that the Son possesses by nature' (*Canticle*: 39.3–6), thus becoming, in a way, other Christs.

In short, Teresa seems to be saying that the person advancing through these 'degrees of prayer' not only grows in knowledge of divine things but also grows and is transformed as a knower. She comes to deeper enlightenment regarding the Trinity not through theological studies but through a new awareness of the Trinitarian life within her. Likewise, the 'union' experienced between her own human nature and God in 'spiritual marriage' provides an analogue for a more profound insight into the Incarnation and hypostatic union. She comes to know more about grace and salvation by experiencing them in herself. In other words, she comes to a new understanding of the mysteries of faith by living them.

If, like many Anglo-American philosophers of religion, one focuses primarily on unusual transitory experiences deemed 'mystical', it may seem that the state of 'spiritual marriage' differs only in intensity and duration, not in kind, from what has gone before, as if it were simply a matter of the same static subject having deeper and longer quasi-perceptions of God or 'undifferentiated unity'. But for Teresa, a person brought to the 'seventh dwelling places' has become a different kind of knower.

Teresa frankly admits that this transformation of the soul enabling a transformed 'loving knowledge' of God is impossible to explain adequately, especially to those who have not themselves undergone what she is trying to describe. Nevertheless, we have argued here that the same virtues she recommends for spiritual growth—such as determination, humility, and detachment—also bring epistemic benefits even in the everyday pursuit of truth and knowledge. Even more importantly, following the mystical path she outlines provides a complementary mode of access to the same realities studied by the theologians, through a deepening personal relationship with the divine and a kind of 'participation' in the divine mysteries. Teresa, like other Christian mystics, insists that the growth in virtue and growth in contemplation go hand in hand, expanding our capacities to know and love.

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## CHAPTER 30

# JOHN WESLEY

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In a 1749 letter to Dr Conyers Middleton, the Anglican evangelist John Wesley succinctly articulated his vision of how theological knowledge was secured. Towards the end of the letter—which itself was anything but succinct—Wesley made an appeal to the primitive church fathers. He suggested that the writings of these fathers 'describe true, genuine Christianity, and direct us to the strongest evidence of the Christian doctrine' (Wesley 1931: Vol. 2: 387). What was it that these writers so clearly signalled? Wesley continues: 'they never relinquish this: "What the Scripture promises, I enjoy. Come and see what Christianity has done here, and acknowledge it is of God" '. We have in this brief statement the key elements of Wesley's conception of how knowledge of God is acquired and confirmed. The scriptures offer a vision of God and salvation, which is conveyed to us in various ways by the Christian church over time and space (including the writings of these primitive fathers). We are then invited, by evangelists such as Wesley, to interact with this God and to experience this salvation for ourselves. If we do, nothing short of an epistemic awakening occurs, as we directly perceive a whole new spiritual world that was previously only known by testimony.

In what follows, I aim to trace the various dimensions of this vision as it is expressed throughout Wesley's writing. My primary thesis is that Wesley's epistemology of theology centred on the interplay between various forms of testimony and immediate perception of the divine, both of which can be seen as instances of divine revelation. In particular, scripture (and its various modes of mediation through the community of faith) provides the *content* of what is known about God and salvation, while perception of the divine provides the strongest and most important *evidence* that those claims are true. In both cases, Wesley understood the agency of God to be essential to the formation of genuine knowledge of God—a factor that makes divine revelation an unavoidable category when coming to terms with Wesley's epistemology.

We should recognize at the outset that, for Wesley, knowledge of God entailed far more than a generic sense of mystery, the divine, or the transcendent. His was not a minimalist theism. Rather, Wesley proclaimed a rich, robust, detailed Christian theism. It is clear that his primary concern was knowing 'the way to heaven', and thus his favoured locus of theology was soteriology. In a famous passage, Wesley wrote: 'I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore' (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 1: 105). Through sermons and other modes of occasional writing, Wesley described the contours of the *via salutis*, the way of salvation. Such an intense focus did not preclude him from affirming a whole host of other doctrines, however. In fact, the very logic of the way of salvation depended on particular and substantial claims about such topics as the Trinity, creation, human nature, and eschatology. We get a glimpse of this in his 1785 sermon 'On Working out our Own Salvation'. In that sermon, he identified 'two grand heads of doctrine, which contain many truths of the most important nature': the atoning work of the Son and the work of the Holy Spirit to renew humanity in the image of God (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 3: 200). The very possibility of salvation depended on specific actions of the triune God. Thus his sustained attention to soteriology should not prevent our recognizing the whole network of theological convictions within which his claims about salvation fit.

Our primary concern in the present discussion is to identify the epistemological dimensions of this network of theological convictions. We are not aiming to trace Wesley's overall epistemological vision, which would involve his views on such areas of knowledge as history, mathematics, or the natural world. Wesley made many scattered comments about epistemology in his writing, and not all of them were necessarily coherent (see, for example, Long 2005: 45, 64–6). Rather, the thesis presented here is meant to account for his explicitly theological claims. The fact that he made unique moves with respect to knowledge of God attests to the value of the epistemology of theology as a distinct arena of epistemological inquiry, to which this volume bears witness. In fact, once we follow Wesley's line of argument, we detect a very bold suggestion: there is an entire dimension of reality that humanity is unable to know by reason or experimentation. This invisible world of God and spirits is only accessible as a free gift of God, given to those who humbly acknowledge their need for what is offered there. In that light, the means of knowing, the content of what is known, and the posture of the knower were for Wesley intimately and necessarily related.

## Problematic Approaches to Wesley's Epistemology

Two approaches have tended to dominate the discussion of Wesley's epistemic commitments: the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and the empiricist–rationalist framework. While each of these approaches offers some insight into Wesley, they ultimately end up obscuring more than they reveal when it comes to getting hold of his specific moves with respect to the knowledge of God and salvation. Once we recognize the ways in which these frameworks leave us wanting, we will be in a better position to hear Wesley on his own terms.

Over the past half-century or so, discussions of theology in Wesleyan and Methodist circles have commonly appealed to four categories known collectively as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. The Quadrilateral has been alternately lifted up as a description of Wesley's epistemological vision, his theological methodology, or the distinctive theological methodology of contemporary Methodism (rather than of Wesley himself). At present we are only concerned with evaluating the first category: does the Quadrilateral shed much light on Wesley's epistemology? It should be noted that Wesley never used the term; Albert C. Outler formulated it in the 1960s by adding experience to the classic Anglican triad of scripture, tradition, and reason. Interestingly, Outler wrote the following in 1985: 'The term "quadrilateral" does not occur in the Wesley corpus—and more than once, I have regretted having coined it for contemporary use, since it has been so widely misconstrued' (Outler 1985: 16). Even so, the question remains whether the Wesleyan Quadrilateral helps us to grasp how Wesley understood the dynamics of knowledge in relation to theological claims.

Much has been written on this question, but I wish to lift up the two most significant shortcomings of the Quadrilateral as an account of Wesley's epistemology (see Abraham 1995 and Gunter et al. 1997). First, the four categories specified by the Quadrilateral are far too broad to reflect many of Wesley's particular concerns. For example, let us consider three very distinct kinds of experience that were factors in his vision of theological knowledge: the witness of the Holy Spirit, the observation of charismatic phenomena, and interviews with people in the course of his ministry as they were pursing entire sanctification. Each of these functioned in different ways as evidence for particular theological claims, and each held different epistemological weight for Wesley. Yet the Quadrilateral places them together in one generic category of experience. The same could be said regarding the category of tradition, as Wesley privileged ante-Nicene writings as well as the Anglican standards of doctrine over other materials from the Christian heritage (see Maddox 1994: 42–4). His reasons for favouring particular elements of the tradition reveal epistemic assumptions that are entirely missed by a simple appeal to the category of tradition (Wesley 1979: Vol. 10: 484). Thus, the categories included in the Quadrilateral are not sufficient to get us to the heart of the specific arguments that Wesley pressed.

Second, appealing to the Quadrilateral provides little guidance as to the relationship between its components. Wesley would not allow, for example, that reason or tradition could supply knowledge about God that is not already present in scripture. To be sure, he saw elements of the tradition as mediating Scriptural claims about God to us in more or less reliable ways. But due to its close connection with divine revelation in Wesley's thought, scripture held a clear priority over tradition or reason as a source of knowledge about God. Furthermore, various kinds of experience related to the other categories in unique ways. For example, the testimony of scripture (mediated through the tradition) that we can become children of God is confirmed by an occasion of perception of the divine; namely, the witness of the Holy Spirit. Wesley's collective experiences in providing spiritual guidance to the people called Methodists, on the other hand, provided a different sort of evidence for theological claims that is best captured by the category of testimony. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is simply ill-equipped to track these distinctions. Despite valiant attempts to clarify the relationships among the components of the Quadrilateral (see Gunter et al. 1997 and Crutcher 2010), the problem remains.

The other primary approach to Wesley's epistemology has been to locate him in the philosophical debate between rationalism and empiricism. Within this framework, Wesley is usually regarded as an empiricist in that he believed that knowledge comes through sense experience rather than through innate ideas. Insofar as Wesley repeatedly rejected the notion of innate ideas, this approach does tell us something important about Wesley's general epistemology (see Wesley 1976–: Vol. 11: 56 and Vol. 4: 29). However, to read Wesley exclusively as an empiricist (particularly in a Lockean sense) is somewhat misleading. Indeed, Wesley's empiricism shared more with the Aristotelian tradition than it did with John Locke's empiricism (see Matthews 1986: 255–80). Furthermore, as D. Stephen Long has suggested, trying to fit Wesley into the modern epistemological discussion obscures the way he drew upon more typically medieval themes. Wesley did not presume the sort of distance from the world that characterizes the post-Cartesian forms of empiricism and idealism. Long argues that Wesley brought empiricist and idealist traditions together by embracing both an emphasis on sensible knowledge and a metaphysics of participation, including a robust understanding of divine illumination (Long 2005: 57).

It is also tempting to understand Wesley's use of the language of spiritual senses as a reflection of Lockean epistemological commitments, but this would obscure as much as it would clarify. There is no question that Wesley self-consciously used the language of spiritual senses as analogous to the physical senses on many occasions, perhaps most famously in his 'Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion' (Wesley 1976: Vol. 11: 56–7). However, as will be developed in what follows, Wesley did not see the spiritual senses as supplying the content of our knowledge. Rather, their primary function was to confirm in the strongest possible sense what was revealed through scripture and conveyed in the Christian tradition. Wesley did not suggest that we use our spiritual senses to search around for ideas to believe about God; he suggested that these senses enable us to perceive directly the unmistakable reality of the ideas presented to us by various forms of testimony. While it is not wrong to regard Wesley as a kind of empiricist in his general epistemology, therefore, we will need to say much more to account for his epistemology of theology.

## Divine Revelation and Testimony: The Conveyance of Robust Christian Theism

In Wesley's view, how do we *acquire* knowledge about God and salvation? I should note that I am not presuming any technical definition of knowledge here. The question could be alternately rendered: for Wesley, how do our minds access the content of robust Christian theism? The crucial epistemological concepts involved in his answer to this question are divine revelation and testimony. Wesley believed that divine revelation is necessary because we simply do not have access to truths about God or the spiritual world unless God chooses to disclose them to us. As he put it in the essay 'Of the Gradual Improvement of Natural Philosophy', 'Whatsoever men know or can know concerning them [God and spirits], must be drawn from the oracles of God. Here, therefore, we are to look for no new improvements; but to stand in the good old paths; to content ourselves with what God has been pleased to reveal' (Wesley 1979: Vol. 13: 487). Moreover, testimony is necessary if we are to come into contact with that which God has been pleased to reveal. Because God's revelation of such truths is connected to specific events in history—the Incarnation of the Son in Jesus and the inspiration of the scriptures primary among them—the mediation of testimony is needed to bridge the span of time and space.

In order to grasp Wesley's understanding of divine revelation, we must first attend to the central role of the incarnation of the Son in Jesus. While Wesley repeatedly connected divine revelation to scripture, he also recognized that the Incarnation was the act of God to which the scriptures primarily gave witness. The light of Jesus's appearance in the world, for Wesley, enabled the most complete knowledge we can have of God's salvific purposes. Perhaps his clearest articulation of this point is found in his sermon 'On Working out our Own Salvation':

> Notwithstanding a spark of knowledge glimmering here and there, the whole earth was covered with darkness till the Sun of Righteousness arose and scattered the shades of night. Since this Day-spring from on high has appeared, a great light hath shined unto those who till then sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. And thousands of them in every age have known, 'that God so loved the world' as to 'give his only Son, to the end that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life'.
>
> (Wesley 1976: Vol. 3: 201)

Thus it would be mistaken to suggest that Wesley *only* conceived of divine revelation in terms of giving humankind a book (though he was willing to use that image in reference to the inspiration of scripture). God also took the initiative to enter into time and space and shed light upon a dark world. Without that work of divine self-disclosure, Wesley believed, we would have remained in ignorance.

How is it, then, that an incarnation located in a particular time and place can be known by 'thousands of them in every age'? Here is precisely where the scriptures come to have such an important place in Wesley's understanding of divine revelation. For he suggested that a second act of divine agency was necessary: the inspiration of the scriptures by the Holy Spirit. The scriptures both drew out the implications of the Incarnation (including the preparatory work of the Old Testament) and preserved them for people in all times and places. And Wesley clearly understood this process to be a work of the Holy Spirit. Consider the Preface to his *Notes on the New Testament*:

> Concerning the Scriptures in general, it may be observed, the word of the living God, which directed the first patriarchs also, was, in the time of Moses, committed to writing. To this were added, in several succeeding generations, the inspired writings of

> the other prophets. Afterwards, what the Son of God preached, and the Holy Ghost spake by the apostles, the apostles and evangelists wrote. This is what we now style the Holy Scripture: this is that 'word of God which remaineth for ever'.
>
> (Wesley 1966: 8–9)

In another remarkable passage, Wesley clearly delineated incarnation and inspiration as fundamental acts of divine revelation that enable us to know the way of salvation. It is found in the Preface to the first volume of his *Sermons on Several Occasions*:

> I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God!
>
> (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 1: 105)

It is crucial that we come to terms with what Wesley is suggesting here. With the divinely inspired scriptures, we now have God's own testimony to what God has done to enable our salvation. That is, we have access to the content of robust Christian theism—centred on God's salvific activity in the world—because God 'hath written it down in a book'.

Because scripture functioned for Wesley as divine testimony to divine salvific work, he would not allow that any human testimony could supersede it. That is not to say, however, that the testimony of Christians could not play an important (if subsidiary) role in the transmission of the content of robust Christian theism. Indeed, Wesley understood human testimony to serve an important function in conveying what the scriptures proclaimed. We can observe this in Wesley's esteem for the writings and example of the early church, which he often termed 'primitive Christianity' (for two helpful discussions of Wesley's appeal to Christian antiquity, see Campbell 1991, and Jones 1995: 81–9). It can also be seen in Wesley's acknowledgment of the authority of the doctrinal standards of the Church of England, in which he was ordained and within which he remained for his entire life (see Jones 1995: 89–94). The mediatory role of human testimony was also implicit in the way he understood his own published sermons to function in the lives of others. As he wrote later in the Preface to the *Sermons*, 'I have accordingly set down in the following sermons what I find in the Bible concerning the way to heaven, with a view to distinguish this way of God from all those which are the inventions of men'. He went on to note his desire that his sermons might guard those 'who are just setting their faces towards heaven, (and who, having little acquaintance with the things of God, are the more liable to be turned out of the way)' (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 1: 106). Two aspects of Wesley's statement here are notable. First, nothing in human testimony is to add to what the scriptures proclaim—he distinguishes what he finds in the Bible from 'the inventions of men'. Second, he does allow that human testimony (in the form of a sermon in plain language) might be useful in preventing misunderstanding of the divine testimony provided in scripture. To put it another way, the church mediates the content of the faith to each generation, but Wesley believed that such content must always be traced back to its source in the Bible (see Wesley 1976–: Vol. 3: 496).

Along with divine testimony and the testimony of the early and contemporary church, there is yet one more form of testimony that merits our attention. This is the testimony of believers that Wesley encountered in his own ministry. He constantly tested various interpretations of biblical claims—particularly with regard to the dynamics of the Christian life—by examining the experience of actual believers. As with the case of other forms of human testimony, Wesley did not allow scripture to be superseded by such testing. The experience of Christians did not supply the content of robust Christian theism. It could, however, mediate the teachings of scripture on a different level from sermons, confessional statements, or the writings of Christian antiquity. Ministerial testing did so by helping to settle questions about how certain biblical claims should be understood (for a helpful discussion of Wesley's practice of ministerial testing, see Crutcher 2010: 141–202). Thus, Wesley understood pastoral practice as a way of refining Christians' comprehension of what God had revealed.

We can thus render Wesley's vision as follows: God reveals the truth about God's nature and salvific activity in the incarnation and the inspiration of scripture. Scripture thus serves as a divine testimony to God's promise of salvation, which is supplemented by the church's testimony that God has acted and spoken in these ways. The claims of scripture mediated by the church are then tested in the lives of believers, the results serving to refine and confirm what has been received. We can see a concrete example of this vision at work in Wesley's sermon 'On Sin in Believers'. At issue here is whether the remains of sin are present in the heart of a believer who has experienced the new birth. Wesley argued strongly that there are such remains, at least initially, and the form of his argument displays the commitments we have outlined. He appeals first to a host of biblical passages that imply the presence of such sin. He then turns to an example of ministerial testing, specifically the experience of God's children who continually feel the effects of sin's remains. Wesley's third move is to claim the strong weight of the Christian tradition. He suggests that his opponents' contention (that there is no sin in the hearts of believers) is:

> quite *new* in the church of Christ; that it was never heard of for seventeen hundred years .... But whatever doctrine is *new* must be *wrong*; for the *old* religion is the only *true* one; and no doctrine can be right unless it is the very same 'which was from the beginning'.
>
> (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 1: 324, emphasis in edition cited)

Finally, he employs another form of ministerial testing, suggesting that the consequences of his opponents' false belief have undermined believers' efforts to fight against the remains of sin. This sermon illustrates, therefore, how Wesley envisioned our acquisition of the content of the Christian faith by means of divine revelation and various levels of testimony.

## DIVINE REVELATION AND PERCEPTION OF GOD: INTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR ROBUST CHRISTIAN THEISM

How do we know whether the content of the Christian faith is true? That is, how does one become convinced that what is received by testimony reflects the way things really are? Wesley answered this question in terms of two basic categories: perception of the divine and testimony (of a different sort than that which mediates the tradition to us). Let us take up the first category, which Wesley understood to be by far the stronger and more important of the two.

Wesley placed tremendous epistemic weight on what was going on in the mind and heart of the believer, the locus of what he sometimes called the internal evidence for Christianity. The internal evidence was not a source of new claims about God; rather, it was the perception of the mind and the heart beyond doubt that scripture's claims about God and salvation are true. As a result of specific actions of the triune God, a believer's ability to perceive God directly is restored. God's agency is necessary towards this end because sin has affected our cognitive faculties, rendering us incapable of seeing the truth about God (see Wesley 1976–: Vol. 11: 63–4). While our physical senses enable us to know the visible and sensible world, they are of no use in apprehending the invisible world. As Wesley wrote in his sermon 'On Discoveries of Faith', our senses 'furnish us with no information at all concerning the *invisible world*. But the wise and gracious Governor of the worlds, both visible and invisible, has prepared a remedy for this defect. He hath appointed *faith* to supply the defect of sense'. He goes on to suggest that faith is the evidence 'of all those invisible things which are revealed in the oracles of God' (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 4: 30, emphasis in edition cited). God has thus graciously provided human beings with the capacity to perceive the truth of the vision received by testimony.

Wesley sometimes referred to this capacity as faith (as above), while at other times he referred to it as the spiritual senses. Throughout his life, Wesley recognized three basic dimensions of faith: assent to the cognitive content of Christianity, trust in Christ alone for his salvation, and (drawing on Heb. 11:1) the perception of the invisible world (for a very helpful discussion of these three senses of faith in Wesley's writing, see Matthews 1986: 240–6). The third dimension gradually came to have the greatest (though never exclusive) emphasis in his writings. In this third sense, faith is truly a gift of God. Lest we suppose that this led Wesley to embrace any sort of determinism with respect to salvation, we should recognize his insistence that the gift of faith is freely given to all who humbly acknowledge their need for it (see Wesley 1976–: Vol. 11: 47–8). This gift of faith as spiritual perception overcomes the cognitive effects of sin and enables us to feel directly what is promised in scripture. Wesley also used the language of spiritual senses to refer to this capacity. When this phrase was used, he often connected the capacity to the experience of the new birth. Just as a baby puts his senses to work after being born, so also the regenerated believer becomes directly sensible of the realities of God and salvation (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 1: 432–5 and Vol. 2: 192–4).

We should recognize here that we are in very different epistemic territory than we were when we considered testimony. While Wesley saw testimony as necessary for conveying the claims of Christianity to us, the spiritual senses enable direct perception of their truth. Just as we 'immediately and directly perceive' the difference between day and night, so also we immediately and directly perceive the difference between spiritual light and darkness 'if our spiritual senses are rightly disposed' (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 1: 282). Furthermore, without such functioning spiritual senses, we are in no position to assess the truth of Christianity. Unless God opens the eyes of our understanding, we cannot apprehend divine things nor judge truly concerning them (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 11: 57).

What precisely is it, then, that we perceive by faith or through our spiritual senses? Wesley was prone to listing the objects of our perception in his various writings, and the lists varied somewhat. But he tended to highlight four items repeatedly. The first two reflect somewhat general perceptions, while the latter two are very specific. First, we come to sense the existence and presence of the God in whom we live, move, and have our being (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 11: 46–7 and Vol. 1: 434–5). Second, we perceive the love, mercy, and goodness of God, qualities for which Wesley often used the image of light (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 11: 46–7, Vol. 1: 435, Vol. 4: 172–3, and Vol. 1: 261). In more particular terms, Wesley suggested that the spiritual senses enable us to know without a doubt that our sins have been forgiven (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 11: 46–7, Vol. 11: 70–1, and Vol. 4: 172). Finally, in one of the most significant epistemic claims in Wesley's theological vision, he drew on Romans 8:16 to claim that we directly perceive our status as children of God (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 1: 267–98). This witness of the Spirit depends not only on restored spiritual senses, but also on the direct action of the Holy Spirit to impart to us an assurance that we are loved and welcomed as God's children. In fact, Wesley understood the agency of God to be driving every dimension of internal evidence. God gives the gift of faith to those who seek it appropriately, God warms the heart of the believer with assurance of forgiveness, and God witnesses to our spirit that we are children of God. Here we see precisely why it is appropriate to understand perception of the divine as an instance of divine revelation. The same God who revealed the way of salvation to us through incarnation and inspiration now reveals unmistakable evidence of its fulfilment—evidence which is inaccessible to those without such faith.

## Testimony and Perception: External Evidence for Robust Christian Theism

Wesley believed that the strongest evidence for the truth of Christian claims rested on immediate perception, but he also allowed for a second sort of evidence. He called this second category external evidence, and it rested on a specific kind of interplay between testimony and perception. Essentially, Wesley recognized that what is perception for one person becomes testimony for another person. He outlined various kinds of such external evidence. Testimonies to conversion, conspicuous sanctity, charismatic phenomena, and miracles all added to the weight of evidence for the fulfilment of what is promised in scripture (for analyses of these sorts of claims in Wesley's writings and their relation to early Methodism, see Abraham 2010: 41–60, and Webster 2013). For Wesley, external evidence based in testimony of this sort carried far more weight than arguments from natural theology (for discussions of the slight variations in Wesley's generally unfavourable attitude towards natural theology, see Maddox 1994: 29–30, and Abraham 2010: 4–5). As opposed to the kind of testimony that mediates the content of robust Christian theism to us, this form of testimony does not supply new claims about God or salvation. Rather, it supplies some moderate evidence that the claims found in scripture are true.

The specific experience of the witness of the Holy Spirit provides a nice example of how this worked in Wesley's thought. If Mary tells Sally about a dramatic experience of the witness of the Spirit, it offers at least a bit of evidence to Sally in favour of the claims of Christianity. Clearly there are many potential defeaters to Mary's claim at this stage. But the more such claims Sally hears, the more evidence they supply (on the epistemic implications of this sort of case, see Abraham 1990: 434–50). Wesley emphasized the value of many such claims:

> And here properly comes in, to confirm this scriptural doctrine, the experience of the children of God—the experience not of two or three, not of a few, but of a great multitude which no man can number. It has been confirmed, both in this and in all ages, by 'a cloud of' living and dying 'witnesses'.
>
> (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 1: 290)

He goes on to suggest, however, that each person will ultimately be satisfied only with the internal evidence provided by experiencing the direct witness of the Spirit. While the testimony of others lends evidence that may impel a person to seek the experience, only the actual perception will do (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 1: 291–2). In fact, in his letter to Conyers Middleton, Wesley was willing to wonder if God's providence had allowed external evidence to be attacked in order to press nominal Christians to seek the internal evidence in their hearts (Wesley 1931: Vol. 2: 384–6). Despite such strong statements of the superiority of internal evidence, he still saw these testimonies as having some epistemic value. In that respect, they merit a place in our account of Wesley's epistemology of theology.

## Wesley's Epistemology of Theology and the Contemporary Setting

At this stage, we are in a position to consider those dimensions of Wesley's vision that might be fruitfully engaged in contemporary epistemological reflection. I wish to offer three suggestions towards that end. First, Wesley's confident embrace of testimony as a crucial concept in the epistemology of theology merits careful attention. For him, testimony served as the primary mode of conveying knowledge about God and salvation to us, given how God has chosen to work in the world. It also supplied a secondary form of evidence to support the truth of that theological vision, though such evidence was never as strong as immediate perception. We need not embrace Wesley's particular way of connecting divine revelation, scripture, and testimony to see the epistemological value of testimony. To the degree that robust Christian theism centres on particular actions of God in the world, the role of the community of faith over time and space is indispensible in mediating the significance of those actions.

Second, the category of immediate perception of God played a pivotal role not only in Wesley's pastoral practice but also in his epistemology of theology. This emphasis suggests considerable points of contact between Wesley and recent epistemological work in perception of the divine, most notably that of William P. Alston (1991). In particular, the role of perception in confirming claims that are mediated through communities warrants careful attention. In Wesley's case, perception enabled through the spiritual senses provided the strongest evidence of the network of claims received by both divine and human testimony. Thus perception of the divine need not supply unique cognitive content to play a significant role in the formation of knowledge.

Finally, Wesley's epistemology of theology displays a careful correlation between the way in which knowledge of God and salvation is accessed and the content of that knowledge. That is, Wesley saw humility, trust, and an awareness of the effects of sin (including the cognitive effects) as necessary to receiving the gift of faith. 'To all who see, and feel, and own their wants, and their utter inability to remove them', Wesley writes, 'God freely gives faith' (Wesley 1976–: Vol. 11: 48–9). This line in his *Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* follows one of the most vivid descriptions of faith as spiritual perception in his entire corpus. Thus, direct awareness of God and the spiritual world is available to all those—and only those—who humbly acknowledge their lack of such awareness. Essentially, Wesley demanded a particular spiritual posture for access to a whole arena of knowledge. This sort of claim has not gained much traction in modern epistemological discourse, at least until recently. But there are signs that there might indeed be room for entertaining such moves, most particularly in the work of Paul K. Moser (see Moser 2008). If the God confessed by Christians desires to relate to human beings in particular ways, and such ways of relating yield knowledge, then one's spiritual dispositions are highly relevant to epistemological considerations. In that light, the vision of John Wesley holds fruitful possibilities for the epistemology of theology.

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# CHAPTER 31

# JONATHAN EDWARDS

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## Basic Epistemic Modalities and their Sanctification

Jonathan Edwards countenances at least three basic epistemic modalities—sense perception, reason (or the power of rational inference), and rational intuition (i.e. judging 'the truth of propositions … immediately, by only looking on the propositions, which is judging by intuition and self-evidence' (Edwards 1957—*Works of Jonathan Edwards* (*WJE*)—23: 359); a fourth candidate, namely testimony, will be discussed in the section on scripture). Each of these modalities is basic in the sense that attempts to establish its reliability are unavoidably circular, appealing to the very modality the reliability of which is in question. These modalities are employed by both the regenerate and unregenerate.

In the regenerate or savingly converted, however, the three basic modalities are broadened to include a new 'sense of the heart', *sanctified* reason, and a *sanctified* intuition that enables someone to just *see* the force of rational arguments for the truths of divinity; that is, to immediately grasp the evidential connections between theological propositions and other propositions which are offered in their support.

Edwards was strongly influenced by continental rationalists such as Malebranche, by Henry More and other Cambridge Platonists, and by the British empiricists (especially Locke). He was also excited by Newton and the new science. In spite of their diversity, these figures and schools of thought had an important feature in common—an almost unbounded confidence in reason's power and scope. Edwards's practice reflects this confidence. Philosophical arguments are deployed to demolish critics, justify the principal Christian doctrines, and erect a speculative metaphysics (a subjective idealism like Berkeley's). Yet Edwards was also a Calvinist who shared the Reformed tradition's distrust of humanity's natural capacities and its suspicion of natural theology. Thus, while Edwards can say that 'arguing for the being of a God according to the natural powers from everything we are conversant with is short, easy, and what we naturally fall into' (*WJE* 13: 373) or claim that we can know that a just God governs the world by the 'light of nature' (*WJE* 18: 77), he can also insist that, in thinking about God, reason is baffled by 'mystery', 'paradox', and 'seeming inconsistence' (*WJE* 23: 371) and claim that uninstructed reason almost invariably errs. If 'God never speaks to or converses at all with mankind', we would most likely think 'there is no being that made or governs the world' or that, if there is, it is not 'properly an intelligent, volitive being' (*WJE* 23: 245f.).

It does not follow that natural theology is either impossible or useless, however. Neither the presence of mystery and paradox nor the impossibility of naked reason's *discovering* spiritual truths precludes its possibility.

For 'paradox' and 'incomprehensibility' also characterize other disciplines whose rational credentials are beyond dispute. Mathematical truths concerning 'surd quantities and fluxions' are incomprehensible in the same sense (*WJE* 20: 485), and 'the reasonings and conclusions of the best metaphysicians and mathematicians concerning infinites are attended with paradoxes and seeming inconsistencies' (*WJE* 23: 371). Again, when we attempt to formulate subjective idealism (which Edwards believed to be both true and demonstrable) 'we have got so far beyond those things for which language was chiefly contrived, that, *unless we use extreme caution*, we cannot speak … without literally contradicting ourselves' (*WJE* 6: 355, emphasis added). Paradoxes attend the disciplines in question because they deal with matters remote from 'the common business and vulgar affairs of life, things obvious to sense and men's direct view'. Their subject matters are not 'the objects and affairs which earthly language was made to express', nor are the truths they discern always 'agreeable to such notions … and ways of thinking that grow up with us and are connatural to us' (*WJE* 23: 368). The difficulties that attend theology are thus no greater in kind (although much greater in degree) than those attending any other discipline that deals with 'high' and 'abstract' matters.

Neither does the fact that unassisted reason cannot discover spiritual truths preclude natural theology's possibility. Edwards denies that correct ideas of God would have occurred to us if we had been left to our own devices. Nevertheless, 'it is one thing' to 'strike upon' a point, and quite another 'to work out a demonstration of' it 'once it is proposed' (*WJE* 23: 434). 'After once suggested and delivered', God's declarations are seen to be 'agreeable to reason' (*WJE* 23: 372). That there is only one God, for example, 'is what, now since the gospel has so taught us, we can see to be truth by our own reason … it can be easily shown by reason to be demonstrably true' (*WJE* 9: 398–9).

Moreover, natural theology is not only possible, it is highly useful since it gives those who are as yet unregenerate 'the greatest advantage for the obtaining of grace' by clearly exhibiting 'the truth to [their] minds'. 'False notions', on the other hand, give 'no opportunity for grace to act, but on the contrary, will hinder its acting' (*WJE* 12: 86).

Even so, in the absence of divine assistance, natural theologians are easily led astray, and even when they are not, the truths of natural theology are insufficient. Reason can demonstrate 'the necessity of repentance after sin', for example, but not 'how to achieve true repentance'. Nor can it provide assurance of salvation. 'Since God is just as well as merciful, reason itself could not assure us that God is ready to forgive', or that 'God would forgive all sins without exception. Nor could it prove to what extent repentance is necessary' (McClymond and McDermott 2012: 142). Without a gift of the Holy Spirit neither reason nor scripture are sufficient to provide saving knowledge of God.

The gift in question is a 'new spiritual sense' whose immediate object is 'the beauty of holiness'—a 'new simple idea' that cannot 'be produced by exalting, varying or compounding' ideas 'which they had before', and that truly 'represents' divine reality (*WJE* 2: 205, 260, and 8: 622).

Edwards sometimes identifies true beauty with the pleasure that holy things evoke in people with spiritual 'frames' or 'tempers' or with the tendency they have to evoke it. At other times he identifies it with the 'consent of being to being'; that is, with 'true benevolence' or holiness. His view appears to be this. True beauty is identical with benevolence or loving agreement in somewhat the same way in which water is identical with $H_2O$ or heat with molecular motion. But benevolence is also the objective basis of a dispositional property, namely a tendency to produce a new simple idea in the savingly converted. This idea is a delight or pleasure in being's consent to being which somehow 'represents' or is a 'perception' of it. Edwards's account of true beauty thus resembles the accounts of colour or extension offered by a number of his contemporaries. Spiritual delight is a simple idea or sensation like our ideas of colour or extension. The dispositional property is a power objects have to produce the new spiritual sensation in our understandings. True benevolence is the objective configuration underlying this power and corresponds to the microstructures of bodies that underlie their tendency to excite ideas of colour or extension in minds like ours. Like simple ideas of redness, say, or extension, the new spiritual sensation 'represents' or is a 'perception' of its object. Just as 'red' or 'extension' can refer to the idea, the power, or the physical configuration that is the basis of that power, so 'true beauty' can refer to the spiritual sensation, to the relevant dispositional property, or to benevolence.

The psychological mechanism underlying the savingly converted's new spiritual sense is their true benevolence or love of being in general. For it is because of the savingly converted's love of being in general, that they delight in or relish or are pleased by that love—that is, by true benevolence or holiness.

Edwards thinks that unassisted reason can prove that God exists, establish many of his attributes, discern our obligations to him, and mount a probable case for the credibility of scripture. But he also believes that grace is needed both to (1) help our natural principles 'against those things that tend to stupefy [them] and to hinder [their] free exercise'—such as our tendency to ignore everything that doesn't bear on our immediate self-interest, and biases arising from temperament, education, custom, and fashion, and to (2) sanctify 'the reasoning faculty' and assist 'it to see the clear evidence there is of the truth of religion in rational arguments' (*WJE* 18: 155, 156f.).

How does it do this? Edwards's view is briefly this. 'Actual ideas' are ideas that are lively, clear, and distinct. Thought has a tendency to substitute 'signs' (i.e. words or images) for actual ideas. While this tendency is useful and normally quite harmless, it impedes reasoning when 'we are at a loss concerning a connection or consequence [between ideas], or have a new inference to draw, or would see the force of some new argument' (*WJE*

18: 457). Since accurate reasoning about a subject matter requires attending to actual ideas of it, one cannot reason accurately about religion if one lacks the relevant actual ideas. To have an actual idea of God, for example, one must have actual ideas of the ideas that compose it. But most of us do not. Those parts of the idea of God that everyone has (ideas of his knowledge, power, and justice, for instance) either are not attended to or, if they are, fail to elicit the appropriate affective reactions. Moreover, we cannot fully understand ideas of affections which we have not experienced and so cannot properly understand God's benevolence if we are not benevolent ourselves. Finally, without the simple idea of true beauty, one cannot understand God's holiness or the facts that depend on it.

True benevolence remedies these deficiencies. Because the desires of the truly benevolent are properly ordered, they closely attend to the ideas of God that everyone has and are suitably affected by them. (They stand in awe of his punitive justice, for example, and are grateful for his benefits.) Furthermore, they understand God's benevolence because their own benevolence mirrors it. Finally, the truly benevolent delight in the benevolence in which holiness consists; that is, they 'perceive' or 'taste' or 'relish' its beauty. Edwards's claim, then, is that to reason accurately about God, one must heave an actual idea of him, and to have an actual idea of him one must be truly benevolent. Right reasoning about religious matters requires right affections.

The direct object of the spiritual sense is true beauty or excellency, but it also has an indirect object—spiritual facts or truths. There are two cases to consider.

The spiritual sense enables us to recognize the truth of propositions that are logically or epistemically related to the excellency of divine things. For example: our apprehension of Christ's beauty and excellency produces a conviction of his sufficiency as a mediator (*WJE* 2: 273, 302). Again, in order to grasp the appropriateness of God's end in creation, namely the communication of his internal glory *ad extra*, one must perceive its beauty. Or yet again, one must see the beauty of holiness to appreciate the 'hatefulness of sin' (*WJE* 2: 274) and thus be convinced of the justice of divine punishment and our inability to make satisfaction or reparations (*WJE* 2: 302). The spiritual sense, in short, enables us to grasp the truth of a number of important religious doctrines.

But it also helps us grasp the truth of the gospel scheme as a whole. A conviction of the gospel's truth is an inference from the beauty or excellency of what it depicts, namely 'God, and Jesus Christ … the work of redemption, and the ways and works of God…. There is a divine and superlative glory in these things' that distinguishes them 'from all that is earthly and temporal' (*WJE* 17: 413). A spiritual person 'truly sees' this glory (*WJE* 2: 208)—his perception of it is as immediate and direct as a perception of colour or of the sweetness of food—and a conviction of the gospel's truth is its 'effect and natural consequence' (*WJE* 17: 413). The perception and conviction are nonetheless distinct. The mind *infers* the truth and reality of the things the gospel contains from its *perception* of their spiritual beauty. There is, however, 'no long chain of arguments; the argument is but one, and the evidence direct; the mind ascends to the truth of the gospel but by one step, and that is its divine glory' (*WJE* 2: 298–9). Because only one step is involved, we can truly say that the divinity or reality or truth of the gospel is 'as it were' known intuitively, that 'a soul may have a kind of intuitive knowledge of the divinity [or truth or reality] of the things exhibited in' it (*WJE* 2: 298).

## SCRIPTURE

Scripture is another reliable epistemic mode. Scripture or 'divine testimony' cannot be opposed to reason because it is a *rule* of reason, a *kind* of evidence, and a *type* of argument, like 'the testimony of our senses may be depended on', 'the testimony of our memories is worthy of credit', and 'the agreed testimony of all we see and converse with continually is to be credited' (*WJE* 23: 361). Apparent memories are a kind of evidence, for instance; justifying claims by appealing to memory is a type of argument, and the appropriate rule is 'One's memories are normally reliable'. Similarly, the contents of scripture are a kind of evidence, justifying claims by appeals to scripture is a type of argument, and the appropriate rule is 'Scripture is trustworthy'. Rules or principles such as these can be established, or at least certified, by reason, and then used to establish other truths that cannot be established without their help—'fire engines are red', for example, or 'Christ atoned for our sin'.

But *how* reason establishes rules or principles like these is by no means clear. Edwards says, for example, that 'general propositions' such as 'memory is dependable' 'can be known only by reason' (*WJE* 23: 360–1). He does not explain how reason knows them, however. Are there arguments for them? Are the rules in question expressions of something like Hume's natural beliefs or Reid's inborn belief dispositions? Even so, it *is* reasonably clear how Edwards thinks that 'Scripture is trustworthy' is established or certified.

Even the unregenerate can acquire a probable conviction of the Bible's truth. Scripture's authority is certified by miracles and fulfilled prophecy, the harmony between revealed and natural religion, scripture's beneficial effects on morality, and the like—arguments all commonly appealed to in the eighteenth century (for one of the better examples, see Clarke 1706: especially Propositions vii–xv). 'None will doubt', says Edwards, 'but that some natural men do yield a kind of assent … to the truths of Christian religion from the rational proofs or arguments that are offered to evince it.' Probabilistic arguments for the truth of the gospel can be drawn from history, and 'lately … these … have been set in a clear and convincing light' by the 'learned' (*WJE* 2: 295, 305). By exercising one's natural faculties, a reasonable person can thus know that scripture is God's declaration and, as a consequence, use 'Scripture is trustworthy' as a rule to extend his or her knowledge.

The strongest evidence for the divine authority of scripture, though, is its spiritual beauty—a feature that unaided natural reason cannot discern. Only those with converted hearts are able to perceive, taste, and relish the stamp of divine splendour on scripture and so be *certain* of its teachings. The beauty or splendour of scripture is ultimately the beauty or splendour of God himself. Christ is scripture's revealer. He is also its content since 'the principal thing that is revealed' is his 'excellency [beauty] and sufficiency' for the world's redemption (*WJE* 14: 250). The perception of scripture's beauty is thus, in effect, a perception of the beauty of God himself.

Scripture is an epistemic mode, then, but is it a *basic* epistemic mode? Scripture is a form of testimony. Edwards nowhere suggests that our reliance on testimony either is or should be based on inferences from the deliverances of other basic modes such as sense perception, memory, or reason, and indeed rather clearly implies that appeals to testimony are basic in the same way that appeals to sense perception or memory are (see *WJE* 23: 361). It is reasonable for a child to believe the words of her parents, for example, in the absence of any proof of their reliability. Yet if testimony can be a basic mode, then—since scripture is a *form* of testimony—so too can scripture.

There is this difference, however. Both the words of our parents and the words of scripture can be reasonably taken on trust. But although the course of experience may and sometimes should lead us to qualify or even reject the teachings of our parents, the course of experience neither will nor should modify the savingly converted's trust in scripture, since the trust of the regenerate is rooted in their direct perception of its divine beauty and splendour.

There are thus three cases to consider: (1) the 'learned' accept scripture on the basis of arguments for the reliability and truth of its testimony; (2) others trust the utterances of scripture because they trust the words of their parents and teachers who have told them that its utterances are reliable; (3) the savingly converted, however, accept scripture's testimony because they perceive its divine splendour.

Scripture is not functioning as a basic epistemic mode in the first case because the learned establish its authority by employing other epistemic modes, namely those used in the establishment of the credibility of *any* historical text (i.e. reasoning, testimony, memory, and the like). The epistemic subjects in the second case rely only on testimony and testimony is a basic epistemic mode. The testimony they ultimately rely on, however, is *human* testimony and human testimony is fallible. Because their belief in divine testimony rests on the fallible testimony of their parents or other human mentors, it shares the latter's exposure to error. The third case is significantly different. Its subjects, too, rely only on testimony but the testimony they rely on is not the testimony of fallible human teachers but the testimony of a scripture that has been authenticated by the certification of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the hearts of believers. Since the contents of scripture are perceived by the saints to be truly beautiful, they immediately conclude that what scripture depicts is real and its claims true. As a consequence, the redeemed find scripture essentially self-authenticating, and hence have no need for further certification. For the saints, therefore, the testimony of scripture is functioning as a basic epistemic mode that is distinct from that of ordinary human testimony.

## Images of Divine Things

The redeemed also have access to another epistemic mode. Typology is the practice of interpreting things, person, or events, (the 'type') as prefigurations of future realities (the 'antitype'). Protestant divines had tended to restrict typology to figures, actions, and objects in the Old Testament which in their view prefigured Christ as their antitype. Edwards extended their practice in three ways.

First, he 'saw even more typological import in the Old Testament than did many of his predecessors' (McClymond and McDermott 2012: 126):

> Thus almost everything that was said or done that we have recorded in Scripture from Adam to Christ, was typical of Gospel things: persons were typical persons, their actions were typical actions, the cities were typical cities, the nation[s] … were typical nations … God's providences towards them were typical providences; … their houses were typical houses, their magistrates typical magistrates, their clothes typical clothes, and indeed the [biblical] world was a typical world.
>
> (*WJE* 9: 289)

Particularly important were 'institutional types,' 'providential types,' and 'personal types. The greatest institutional type is the practice of sacrifice; the greatest providential type is the Exodus; and the greatest personal type is David' (McClymond and McDermott 2012: 127).

Second, Edwards interpreted the *New* Testament typologically as well, arguing that its persons, actions, and objects prefigure events in the church's later history.

Third, and most radically, Edwards extended the doctrine of typology to nature and secular history. Thus, meadows and gentle breezes are images 'of the sweet benevolence of Jesus Christ', 'the blue sky, of his mildness and gentleness', and comets and thunders, rocks and mountains of 'his awful majesty' (*WJE* 13: 279). 'Children's coming into the world naked and filthy, and in their blood, and crying and impotent, is to signify the spiritual nakedness and pollution of nature and wretchedness of condition with which they are born.' 'The sun's so perpetually… sending forth his rays in such vast profusion, without any diminution of his light and heat, is a bright image of the all-sufficiency and everlastingness of God's bounty and goodness' (*WJE* 11: 54). The pains and travail of childbirth 'represent the great persecutions and sufferings of the Church in bringing forth Christ … and [are] a type of those spiritual pains that are in the soul when bringing forth Christ' (*WJE* 11: 55). 'The waves and billows of the sea in a storm' represent 'the terrible wrath of God' (*WJE* 11: 58). The rising of the sun represents Christ's resurrection through which the world is brought from darkness into light (*WJE* 11: 66).

But non-biblical types are not only found in nature; they are found in secular history as well, and even in its false religious systems. Roman military triumphs were a type of Christ's Ascension, for example. 'Pagan idolatry—in which deities were believed to inhabit material forms—was a type of the true Incarnation', and 'the near universal practice of human sacrifice in world religions was divinely intended as a type of the perfect sacrifice of God's Son' (McClymond and McDermott 2012: 128–9). In short, the world *in its entirety* and not just the world of the Bible was a 'typical world'.

How did Edwards justify these novelties? He believed that physical facts are images of mental or moral facts, and quoted from Turnbull's *The Principles of Moral Philosophy* with approval:

> All words being originally expressive of sensible qualities, no words can express moral ideas. But so far as there is such an analogy betwixt the natural and moral world, that objects in the latter may be shadowed forth, pictured, or imaged to us by some resemblances to them in the former.
>
> (*WJE* 11: 126)

It is therefore not unreasonable to 'suppose that [God] makes the inferior in imitation of the superior, the material of the spiritual', and that 'the corporeal and visible world' is 'designedly made and constituted in analogy to the more spiritual, noble, and real world' (*WJE* 11: 53, 69f.). Furthermore, Edwards thought that natural or 'secondary' beauty is an image of spiritual or 'primary' beauty. Creation is *saturated* with secondary beauty—not only the 'harmony of sounds, and the beauties of nature' to which Edwards was especially sensitive, but also the beauties of human kindness and affections, just institutions, artistic and intellectual creations, and the like. As a consequence, the world shadows forth a God who, because he is preeminently great and holy, is beauty itself, the pattern, fountain, and source of all beauty (*WJE* 8: 550f., 565). Finally, Edwards believed that the world is God's speech. His 'works … are but a kind of voice or language of God, to instruct intelligent beings in things pertaining to himself' (*WJE* 11: 67).

While the views cited in the preceding paragraph do not entail that our world is a 'typical world', they do make it more likely. A doctrine of typology like Edwards's fits together or coheres with his broadly Platonic picture of the world in a way in which it would not fit together or cohere with a more mechanistic or reductive metaphysics.

But if God's works *are* a kind of speech or language that he uses to instruct us, what sort of speech or language is it? Both allegory and symbolism use concrete images to express moral or spiritual facts. While there is not a hard and fast line between the two, they can be roughly distinguished as follows.

First, allegories and emblems are consciously invented. The artist (e.g. Spenser or Bunyan or Hawthorne) perceives a spiritual or moral fact which he then consciously and deliberately represents or typifies by choosing suitable images. He may express the struggle between our darker passions and our yearning for purity and order by personifying the passions and virtues, and depicting the struggle as warfare. Or jealousy may be concretely expressed as a serpent in the bosom. Symbols, however, are typically produced by processes that are not fully conscious.

Second, while the meaning of an allegory or emblem can be expressed conceptually, the meaning of a symbol cannot be fully or adequately expressed in non-symbolic terms. A perception of the moral and spiritual facts that symbols express is inextricably bound up with their use and cannot be adequately grasped apart from it. Literal accounts of the things suggested by Melville's white whale, for example, inevitably seem reductive.

Good symbols are, as Tillich said, 'inexhaustible in meaning'. What they say cannot be reduced to a set of literal statements.

Are Edwards's types emblems or symbols? Everything other than God is a product of his conscious intentions. So if objects of the natural or human world shadow forth or picture or image the things of God or the mysteries of faith, God has *designed* them to do so. The images or types are thus consciously invented. Their meaning can also be more or less adequately or fully expressed conceptually. An examination of Edwards's typological writings clearly attests to the fact that he believes that the images he discusses contain decipherable meanings. Nor does Edwards say anything that would suggest that he thinks that his conceptual accounts of their meaning are in principle inadequate, or that ultimately their meaning cannot be expressed without the help of further images. (That said, he does say things which suggest that he believes that his conceptual interpretations of the types he discusses are incomplete. For example, 'The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth' asserts that 'Those who have … studied [scripture] the longest, and have made the greatest attainments in this knowledge' confess that they only know a 'little of what is to be known'. Because God is 'infinite, and there is no end to the glory of his perfections', scripture's 'subject is inexhaustible', and will 'employ … the saints and angels to all eternity' (*WJE* 22: 95). That conceptual implications are never complete, however, does *not* entail that any aspect of the image to be explicated escapes conceptual explication in principle.)

Edwards's types, then, are emblems, not symbols. Yet why would God choose to speak to us by using images and types, instead of employing a more literal or conceptual language? For two reasons. 'First, because types have pedagogical value. Many types are pictures of a sort, and a picture is worth a thousand words … Edwards wrote, "temple of the Holy Ghost" expresses in three words what would otherwise take a hundred. "By such similitudes, a vast volume is represented to our minds in three words; and things that we are not able to behold directly, are represented before us in lively pictures"' (*WJE* 13: 181). Second, because 'types also have affective value … fallen human beings … are more affected "by those things [they] see with [their] eyes and hear with [their] ears and have experience of"' (McClymond and McDermott 2012: 123–4, *WJE* 14: 140). People also delight in mimesis as we can infer from their enjoyment of the 'imitative arts'. And types, too, 'use the principle of *mimesis*' and thus, like the arts, 'fulfill human desires for the dramatic and beautiful'. By engaging our affective capacities, the 'subjects taught by types are more easily remembered, and moral [and spiritual] lessons taught are received with deeper impression and greater conviction' (McClymond and McDermott 2012: 123–4).

Yet does not the use of types and other images open the door to the possibility of all sorts of fanciful interpretations? The danger is real but avoidable. Scripture itself explains some types (see e.g. Heb. 5–10 and 13, Rom. 5:6–17, or Eph. 5:25–33), and these explanations provide us with precedents or models for interpreting other scriptural types. To apply the scriptural models correctly, however, we must be 'of a poetical and gracious disposition' (*WJE* 13: 363) and—most important of all—have converted hearts. The best way to learn the language of types is 'by much use and acquaintance together with good taste or judgment, comparing one thing with another and having our sense as it were exercised to discern it' (*WJE* 11: 151). The taste in question is that of a regenerate heart. 'If one's interpretation of a type does not display the divine beauty, one has missed its meaning' (McClymond and McDermott 2012: 125). It will therefore sound 'very harsh in the ears of those who are well versed in the [divine] language' (*WJE* 11: 151). Edwards's general point is 'that a person with the [new] sense of the heart is to use the biblical precedents and her own sense of what is harmonious with the work of redemption'—which is scripture's central or primary topic—'to discover and then interpret an [as yet unexplained biblical] type' (McClymond and McDermott 2012: 125).

Our interpretations of biblical types will then in turn provide us with models or guides for the interpretation of extra-biblical types. Just as the Bible's moral lessons can be applied to personal, social, economic, and political situations not directly envisaged by it (laissez-faire capitalism, for example, or the workings of modern democratic polities, or new problems created by recent medical research) so the hermeneutical principles used to explain biblical types, and the precedents created by those explanations, can be used to interpret events in nature and in secular history.

The interpretation of types is, then, an important and novel epistemic mode. It is not, however, a basic one since its correct employment is dependent on the proper use of two more primary modes—the testimony of scripture and the operations of the saints' new sense of the heart.

## Conclusion

A number of strands of Edwards's epistemology are worth pursuing further. I will close by briefly discussing two.

A proper attention to Edwards's remarks on reason might lead to a more nuanced picture of the relation between natural and revealed theology. While Karl Barth, for example, is suspicious of natural theology, Edwards is not. For Barth, natural theology exists:

> in *opposition* to the actual knowledge of God mediated through his word and … must therefore be called into question by it as illegitimate and *invalid* in so far as it claims to be knowledge of God as he really is…. The fact that God himself had to become man in order to break away through our estrangement and darkness … not only precludes us from entertaining other possibilities of a way from man to God but actually *invalidates* them all.
>
> (Torrance 1970: 125–6, emphasis in original)

Alternatively, Edwards welcomes natural theology. When properly employed, supernaturally unassisted reason can discern many important truths about God and his relation to us.

The distance between Edwards and Barth may be narrower than might at first appear, however. For Edwards thinks that the idea of God that the unregenerate have is necessarily incomplete. They not only lack an 'actual idea' of God's holiness, and hence of the divine properties that are essentially connected to it, but they also find it difficult to fully appreciate elements of the idea of God which everyone recognizes are part of it—his awful majesty, for example, or the extent of the debt we owe him.

But if this is correct, then the natural theologian's idea of God may be not only incomplete, but also distorted. It arguably is as if the natural theologian succumbs to the temptation of *replacing* the God of faith with the God of the philosophers. Note that a description of someone can be misleading, present a false picture, even if every statement included in that description is true. It can do this by omitting important truths including truths that would modify the contextual implications of truths that *are* included in the description if they too were included in it. The natural theologian's picture of God is arguably false or misleading in just this way. By omitting to mention that God exhibits his power chiefly in showing pity and mercy, for example; by making it easy to construe God's goodness as utility maximization; and especially by refusing to recognize that God's glory is primarily revealed 'in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. 4:6), the Christian believes that the God of natural theology is an impoverished and potentially misleading simulacrum of the real thing. In living theistic religions such as Christianity, theses of natural theology such as God's omnipotence or perfect goodness are intimately interwoven with other theses which, by being articulated, help to determine the meaning they have for the tradition in question. Christians articulate the doctrine of God's goodness, for example, by deploying the Christian story of redemption and, in so doing, inflect or qualify its meaning.

And this is not too far from Barth himself. In an essay entitled 'The First Commandment as an Axiom for Theology', Barth urges us to be cautious in attempting to supplement revelation by adding independent sources of knowledge of God. If we choose to do so, however, we should be very careful to speak of revelation with 'heightened seriousness and interest', and to speak of the other source (such as natural theology) 'only secondarily and for the sake of revelation'. Obedience to the first commandment requires that we interpret 'those other things according to revelation, and not the other way around' (Barth 1986). For example, even if the natural theologian can show that God is all powerful, his power must be interpreted in the light of revelation, that is by what God has done and has promised to do, not by abstract philosophical ideas of omnipotence.

Another strand of Edwards's epistemology that is also worth pursuing is his insistence that a renewed heart is a necessary precondition of doing good work in theology. This insistence, of course, is not new. Henry More, for example, spoke for all the Cambridge Platonists when he said 'The oracle of God [reason] is not to be heard but in his holy temple—that is to say, a good and holy man, thoroughly sanctified in spirit, soul, and body' (More 1662: viii). And John Smith says:

> Were I indeed to define divinity, I should rather call it a divine life, than a divine science.... Everything is best known by that which bears a just resemblance and analogy with it, and therefore the scripture is inclined to set forth a good life as the ...

> fundamental principle of divine science.... The reason why, notwithstanding all our acute reasons and subtle disputes, truth prevails no more in the world is that we so often disjoin truth and true goodness, which in themselves can never be disunited.... Some men have too bad hearts to have good heads; they cannot be good at theory who have been bad in practice.
>
> (Smith 1660: 1–2, 4, 12)

But while the insistence that the theologian needs a renewed heart is not new, it can be forgotten too easily. The seventeenth-century Puritan William Pemble warned against the:

> profane study of sacred things, to know only, not to do, to satisfy curiosity or give contentment to an all searching and comprehending wit; [to] study Divinity as [one] would do the other arts, looking for no further aid than Nature's ability ... [to] read the Scriptures, as we do moral authors, collecting what pleaseth [our] fancy ... but no whit for sanctification of the heart.
>
> (Morgan 1986: 74)

Whether Pemble's charge is applicable to some contemporary theology is worth exploring. Is the need for a renewed heart unduly rejected in modern theologizing? Merely taken for granted? Or is it, rather, in at least some cases, simply present in a different form? For Barth, for example, Christian faith is a precondition of Christian theologizing, and faith (as understood by Barth and other Protestants) has rich affective as well as cognitive dimensions.

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# CHAPTER 32

# FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER

KEVIN W. HECTOR

SUPPOSE that there are at least two epistemological approaches to any given subject, one of which is governed by a principle of epistemic *uniformity*, the other by a principle of epistemic *fit*. The former is based on the idea that knowledge of any given subject can be attained only by following a sort of one-size-fits-all epistemic procedure, involving certain belief-forming mechanisms, for instance, or certain sources of warrant. The latter approach, by contrast, is based on the idea that what leads to knowledge depends, in some important respect, upon features of that which is to be known, such that the appropriate procedure may differ from case to case. This volume is animated, I take it, by a commitment to the latter approach, and so to the epistemic difference it might make if God were the would-be object of knowledge.

In the contemporary landscape, there is something novel about a volume dedicated to such an approach, but not entirely so, since a long line of figures have developed theological epistemologies meant specifically to deal appropriately with God as their would-be object. We see this, for instance, in the recurrent theological worry about how one can know God without inadvertently treating God as an idol, or as one object among others; in some Reformation traditions, accordingly, theologians have long insisted that one can cognize God *as God* only on the basis of God's grace, and, as such, that knowledge *of* God is a form of faith *in* God.

Friedrich Schleiermacher was concerned throughout his career with the problem of epistemic fit, and his eventual solution belongs to the Reformation tradition according to which God can be apprehended only by faith (which is to say that Schleiermacher, too, should be seen as an exponent of, and potential contributor to, so-called Reformed epistemology). His key claims are as follows: (a) that God is the one upon whom all that exists depends absolutely; (b) that God can be apprehended as God only insofar as everything, including oneself, is apprehended as absolutely dependent upon God; (c) that humans are 'God-forgetful,' insofar as we apprehend the world as if it were independent, and, so, misapprehend God; and (d) that we can be redeemed from our God-forgetfulness, and so apprehend God properly, only insofar as the perfect God-consciousness of Christ is mediated to us by his Spirit. For Schleiermacher, then, one can stand in a proper epistemic relationship to God only on the basis of God's redeeming love.

## RECONCILIATION AND THE ABSOLUTE

We see Schleiermacher's concern with the problem of epistemic fit already in his early writings on Spinoza (written 1793–4).[1] These essays are devoted primarily to understanding Spinoza's claims rather than to advancing Schleiermacher's own, yet looking back at them from the perspective of his subsequent development, we can see some rudiments of Schleiermacher's own views (cf. Lamm 1996). Following Spinoza, Schleiermacher reasons that the Infinite cannot be understood as a finite phenomenon, obviously, but neither can it be understood as standing over against such phenomena, for in that case the Infinite would be treated as if it were something outside the finite realm, and so as itself finite. Schleiermacher then considers two approaches to this issue, one of which is relevant to our concerns: the Infinite can be understood, on this approach, not as something one perceives, but as that by means and in terms of which anything might be perceived. Schleiermacher thus suggests that:

> the genuinely true and real in the mind is the feeling of being, the immediate idea, as Spinoza calls it. This idea, however, is never itself perceived, but only particular ideas and experiences of will are perceived, and except for these nothing exists in the mind in any moment of time. But can one say that particular ideas had their independent, individual existence? No, nothing actually exists other than the feeling of being—the immediate idea. Particular ideas are only its manifestations.
>
> (Schleiermacher 2013: 155)

The Infinite, then, is not a discrete object, which means that it cannot be perceived or conceptualized as if it were, and, therefore, that one cannot become aware of it through the mediation of one's usual perceptual and conceptual capacities; hence, if one is to apprehend the Infinite *as* Infinite, one must do so (a) without such mediation, and (b) in such a way that one is oneself included in it. Insofar as it meets these conditions, 'the feeling for being' seems like a good candidate for explaining the possibility of one's apprehending the Infinite. Schleiermacher may not have realized it at the time, but this idea was to play an important role in the development of his thought.

We see it play such a role already in the 1799 *Speeches*, when Schleiermacher claims, famously, that 'religion is the sensibility and taste for the infinite' (Schleiermacher

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[1] I am here adapting some material from Ch. 3 in Hector 2015. In order to make this chapter more accessible to Anglophone readers, I have tried to stick closely to existing English translations, but I have used my own translations wherever necessary.

1996a: 23). This claim obviously echoes those earlier ascribed to Spinoza, specifically concerning the immediacy of one's awareness of the infinite. Schleiermacher's mature view does not emerge, however, until around 1811, when he finally begins to develop a consistent model for thinking about the Infinite, the key claims of which are (a) that the finite realm is constituted by opposing forces, and (b) that the Infinite (or 'the Absolute,' or 'God') is that in and by which such oppositions are united.

To understand what these claims mean, and by what right Schleiermacher asserts them, consider the line of reasoning defended in his lectures on epistemology, which Schleiermacher entitled *Dialektik*. Schleiermacher argues, first, that knowledge depends upon the unity of thought and being; he claims, accordingly, that 'knowing is the congruence of thinking with being as what is thought', and that 'knowing is the pure coinciding of reason with being' (Schleiermacher 1996b: Lectures 8 and 10). To know that an apple is red, therefore, or that a performer is skilful, is for one's belief to that effect to correspond with or be at one with an actual state of affairs. Second, although knowledge depends upon a unity between thought and being, Schleiermacher argues that this unity can be found neither in the realm of thought nor in that of being; knowledge must therefore depend upon a ground that transcends both. As evidence that this unity cannot be grounded either in thought or in being alone, Schleiermacher points to the failures of empiricism and idealism: on the one hand, empiricism 'denies the concept, but in practice it assumes the concept, for the combination without which it does not effectuate any judgement is given to it as a concept'; idealism, on the other hand, 'denies the organic function [that is, the input of mind-independent reality], but in practice it assumes the organic function; this is so, for it cannot construe the manifold belonging to a subordinate concept as a concept; rather it must come forth as something individual by means of the organic function' (Schleiermacher 1996b: Lecture 13). Hence, although knowledge depends upon the unity of thought and being, neither thought nor being can supply this unity, which leads Schleiermacher to claim that the ground of their unity must transcend them; here, he terms this ground of unity 'the Absolute'. Schleiermacher claims, accordingly, that 'we derive the correspondence between thinking and being in real knowing only from the original identity of the two in the Absolute' (Schleiermacher 1996b: Lecture 24). (This exemplifies one of Schleiermacher's favourite argumentative strategies, wherein he argues (a) that two sorts of phenomena must hang together; (b) that their hanging together cannot be explained in terms of either phenomenon; and, therefore, (c) that they hang together only in virtue of that which transcends both.) Schleiermacher then claims, third, that the Absolute cannot itself be known, since it is rather the transcendent ground of all knowing. This explains his claim, for instance, that:

> we have the concept of the Absolute not as this or that individual thing but have it as reason, and as such we have also approached what is supreme as closely as possible … Insofar as we are not the Absolute itself, we also do not have the concept of the Absolute—thus, we do not have it from the side of the organic function but only as the formal element common to all acts of cognition, and its organic side would exist only in the totality of all knowledge of what is finite and individual.
>
> (Schleiermacher 1996b: Lecture 23)

The Absolute is thus known only as the ground of knowledge, and, therefore, not as one might know a particular fact. However, Schleiermacher then argues, fourth, that we are not completely ignorant of the Absolute, for we do know that it is that in which thought and being (along with other apparent oppositions) are united. This is one of Schleiermacher's most fundamental points. He claims, accordingly, that 'the idea of the Absolute is the fullness of identity with the consciousness of the contrasts that are contained therein', and that 'what is Absolute and the total being-in-common of individual things are one and the same' (Schleiermacher 1996b: Lectures 20 and 44). That brings us to the final step of his argument, in which Schleiermacher claims that if the Absolute alone is that in which finite oppositions are united, then finite oppositions will become either one-sided or seemingly antithetical only insofar as they are not set in relation to their transcendent Ground; Schleiermacher thus insists that 'no contrast is absolute; rather all contrasts are only relative. An instance of thinking that isolates a supposedly absolute contrast', accordingly, 'represents nothing actual' (Schleiermacher 1996b: Lecture 28). By 1811, then, Schleiermacher understands the Absolute as that in which finite oppositions are united, and understands the created world precisely in terms of such contrasts.

Based on his earlier writings, we might expect Schleiermacher to argue that we apprehend the Absolute through feeling; this is precisely what we see in later, more fully elaborated editions of his *Dialektik*, in which he claims (a) that a person's life hangs together as a unity only in virtue of a feeling of universal dependence (*allgemeine Abhängigsgefühl*), and (b) that this feeling is therefore analogous to the transcendent Ground upon which everything depends and in which all oppositions are united. With respect to epistemic fit, then, Schleiermacher seems here to be claiming that one can apprehend the Absolute *as* Absolute only insofar as one is immediately conscious of the world's—and one's own—utter dependence upon this Absolute.

## Redeeming God-Consciousness

Schleiermacher will claim, accordingly, that persons apprehend God as God—and so stand in the right sort of epistemic relationship to God—only insofar as they are immediately conscious that everything is absolutely dependent upon a transcendent Ground. In response to this claim, one might reasonably wonder whether everyone is immediately conscious of such dependence (which may seem plausible), and, if so, whether Schleiermacher is therefore claiming that everyone stands in a proper epistemic relationship to God (which seems less plausible). To address these questions, we turn to Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith*, whose theological epistemology we should now be well positioned to understand.

In light of the developments just traced, it is hardly surprising that Schleiermacher frames his argument in terms of a finite opposition that is overcome only in relation to an Absolute in which opposites coincide; here, the fundamental opposition is that between freedom and dependence. Schleiermacher builds up to this opposition by claiming, first, that 'in every moment of self-consciousness there are two elements, which we might call respectively a self-posited element [*ein Sichselbstsetzen*] and a non-self-posited element [*ein Sichselbstnichtsogesetzthaben*]' and that 'the latter presupposes for every moment of self-consciousness another factor besides the I, a factor which is the source of the particular determination, and without which the self-consciousness would not be precisely what it is' (Schleiermacher 1928: §4.1). The idea is straightforward enough: every moment of one's life, Schleiermacher argues, is determined partly by oneself and partly by that which is other than one; Schleiermacher terms these, respectively, the *spontaneous* (*selbsttätig*) and *receptive* (*empfänglich*) elements of one's experience, which correspond, in self-consciousness, with a feeling of freedom and a feeling of dependence (Schleiermacher 1928: §4.1–4.2). Schleiermacher then argues that receptivity and spontaneity characterize not only one's own experience of the world, but the world itself. To substantiate this point, he begins by considering an idealized example in which one's spontaneity and receptivity are related to a single object; in such a case, he claims, one's spontaneity would correspond precisely with the object's receptivity, and one's receptivity would correspond with its spontaneity. Schleiermacher characterizes such relationships as 'reciprocal,' and claims that all worldly relationships exemplify such reciprocity, since every spontaneous action affects something else, and every being-affected is due to some spontaneous act, in an organic network of mutual interrelationship. The entire realm of such reciprocity simply is the 'world', which Schleiermacher thus understands as a sort of organism or as a hanging-together of all finite entities, in which each is receptive to the spontaneity of all, and all receptive to the spontaneity of each (Schleiermacher 1928: §§4.2, 34.1).

From these claims about the world and one's place in it, Schleiermacher infers that we, along with everything else in the world, are absolutely dependent, and that our relative freedom makes us immediately conscious of this fact. Schleiermacher argues, towards this end, that:

> the self-consciousness which accompanies all our activity … and negatives absolute freedom, is itself precisely a consciousness of absolute dependence, for it is the consciousness that the whole of our spontaneous activity comes from a source outside of us in just the same sense in which anything towards which we should have a feeling of absolute freedom must have proceeded entirely from ourselves.
>
> (Schleiermacher 1928: §4.3)

On its face, this argument might seem to entail that one is absolutely dependent upon the world, since one's birth, sustenance, etc. are apparently due to worldly factors, just as the objects to which one's freedom is directed are altogether worldly. Schleiermacher counters, however, that one's consciousness of absolute dependence finds its terminus neither in any worldly entity nor in the world itself, since (a) everything in the world is likewise caught up in a reciprocal relationship of spontaneity and reciprocity, and so is not the spontaneous source of its own spontaneity, and (b) the world itself is constituted by the entire network of such reciprocal relationships, and is therefore partly dependent upon one's freedom; as such, it cannot be the terminus of one's absolute dependence. Schleiermacher thus argues that:

> we recognize in our self-consciousness a co-positedness with [*Mitgesetztsein*] the world, but it is different from the co-positedness of God in the same self-consciousness. For the world, if we assume it to be a unity, is nevertheless in itself a divided and disjointed unity which is at the same time the totality of all antitheses and differences and of all the resulting manifold determinations, of which every man is one, partaking in all the antitheses. To be one with the world in self-consciousness is nothing else than being conscious that we are a living part of this whole; and this cannot possibly be a consciousness of absolute dependence; the more so that all living parts stand in reciprocal interaction with each other.
>
> (Schleiermacher 1928: §32.2)

Schleiermacher argues, therefore, that everything in the world is absolutely dependent, and that humans are immediately conscious of this fact.

By 'immediate consciousness', Schleiermacher means that one is tacitly aware of one's absolute dependence—that this is the condition in which one always finds oneself—precisely inasmuch as one's freedom always depends upon factors that are not themselves due to one. This consciousness must be immediate, Schleiermacher thinks, for otherwise, if one became aware of one's absolute dependence only by dint of one's representational capacities, then that upon which one is absolutely dependent would be treated as if it were something with respect to which one could be spontaneous. That is not to suggest, however, that one cannot become conscious of this consciousness; on the contrary, the concept 'God' exists, for Schleiermacher, precisely so as to name the Whence of this consciousness. The point, rather, is that one is absolutely dependent prior to one's becoming explicitly conscious of this fact, and that one's pre-reflective attunement to the world and oneself already reflects this fact, since one only ever acts freely amidst other entities upon which one depends to some degree. The claim, then, is that we necessarily stand in reciprocal relationships with our surroundings, and that our so standing involves an implicit acknowledgment that we ourselves, along with our freedom, are utterly dependent upon that which necessarily transcends our freedom.

These claims are crucial to Schleiermacher's theological epistemology, but before proceeding we must register a terminological shift: given his view of the world and one's place in it, Schleiermacher gathers the entire realm of relative freedom and dependence into the category of 'sensible life', and terms one's awareness of this realm 'sensible self-consciousness' (Schleiermacher 1928: §§4.2, 5.1). Likewise, given his claims about the entire world's absolute dependence on that which transcends it, Schleiermacher contends that one's awareness of such dependence lies at the root of the concept 'God', such that one's consciousness of absolute dependence can equally be termed one's 'God-consciousness' (Schleiermacher 1928: §4.4). Hence, when Schleiermacher hereafter discusses 'God-consciousness', he is referring to one's consciousness of absolute dependence, and when he discusses 'sensible self-consciousness', he is referring to one's consciousness of relative freedom and dependence—that is, one's consciousness of the reciprocal relationships by which the world, and one's place in it, is constituted.

With that terminology on board, we can now say more about how Schleiermacher understands their relationship and, crucially, the issue of 'epistemic fit'. There are in fact two ways in which the God-consciousness and the sensible-consciousness can relate, depending upon the extent to which the latter is integrated into the former: if the God-consciousness is subordinated to the sensible-consciousness, then one will apprehend God as if God were part of the world and, so, stand in an epistemically unfitting relationship to God; by contrast, if one subordinates sensible-consciousness to the God-consciousness, one will apprehend God as the one upon whom all things, including oneself, depend absolutely, and so stand in an epistemically fitting relationship to God. On the one hand, then, to subordinate sensible-consciousness to the God-consciousness would be to experience all things as absolutely dependent upon God; in that case, 'every moment … would offer to the human spirit an abundance of stimuli to develop those conditions in which the God-consciousness can realize itself' (Schleiermacher 1928: §59 Thesis). On the other hand, to subordinate God-consciousness to the sensible-consciousness would be to experience the latter as independent of the former, and so to experience the world as not dependent upon God; as such, one apprehends God otherwise than as the one upon whom all things depend absolutely. One then experiences what Schleiermacher characterizes as:

> an obstruction or arrest of the vitality of the higher self-consciousness, so that there comes to be little or no union of it with the various determinations of the sensible self-consciousness, and thus little or no religious life. We may give to this condition, in its most extreme form, the name of *Godlessness* or, better, *God-forgetfulness* (*Gottvergessenheit*).
>
> (Schleiermacher 1928: §11.2, emphasis in original)

As Schleiermacher sees it, then, persons may relate to the world as if it—including, but not limited to, their place in it—were independent, which is a kind of forgetfulness of the One upon whom all things depend absolutely. God could not then be apprehended as the One upon whom all things depend absolutely—even if one affirmed that this is true of God—such that one's would-be apprehension of God would not have the right epistemic fit.

Schleiermacher then claims that persons not only *may* stifle their sense of absolute dependence, but that all persons in fact *do* stifle that sense. This is the case, he argues, for two reasons. The first is that, because humans develop as they do, the sensible consciousness emerges before the God-consciousness; when the latter finally materializes, therefore, it is no match for the sensible consciousness, which persons have already become accustomed to treating as if it were absolute (Schleiermacher 1928: §67.2). By the time the God-consciousness could so much as appear, therefore, persons' dispositions have already been thoroughly formed by their sensible consciousness, and so they perceive and act upon their surroundings as if they were absolute. In such a situation, the emerging God-consciousness, too, will be perceived and acted upon as if it were yet another item in one's surroundings, instead of integrating those surroundings—and oneself—into it. By itself, this would already be sufficient to ensure the God-forgetfulness of all humans. Matters are worsened, however, by the second reason that humans stifle their sense of absolute dependence: the fact that we are social animals, since the forgetfulness of each exacerbates the forgetfulness of all. Schleiermacher thus argues that, 'in virtue of this dependence of the specific constitution of the individual life upon a larger common life, as also of the later generations upon the earlier, the sin of the individual has its source in something beyond and prior to his own existence' (Schleiermacher 1928: §69.1). Schleiermacher thus claims that God-forgetfulness is a universal human condition, since (a) the later emergence of the God-consciousness ensures its subordination to the sensible consciousness, and (b) one is socialized into a community of the forgetful, such that one's self-consciousness is inescapably infused with a God-forgetting 'we'-consciousness.

Unfortunately, once the God-consciousness has been subordinated to the sensible consciousness, one can do nothing to reorient oneself, for the apparent reason that any such reordering would itself necessarily be brought within one's worldly horizon. Schleiermacher thus claims that:

> if the disposition to the God-consciousness is obscured and vitiated, then man, just because his God-consciousness, though the best thing in him, is thus polluted and untrustworthy, must be wholly incapable not only of developing, but even of consciously aspiring to, such inner states as would harmonize with the proper aim and object of the said disposition.
>
> (Schleiermacher 1928: §70.1)

It would thus appear that we are doomed to misapprehend God, insofar as we are no longer able to establish a right epistemic fit between God and our would-be apprehension of God.

This brings us to the heart of Schleiermacher's theology, namely humanity's redemption in Christ. We should now be well positioned to understand the best-known feature of Schleiermacher's Christology—that is, the centrality he accords to Jesus's perfect God-consciousness—since this is precisely what must be restored in us if we are to be redeemed. Schleiermacher thus contends that 'the capacity of the God-consciousness to give the impulse to all of life's experiences and to determine them' is the ideal which humanity was meant to instantiate, and that this ideal was perfectly realized in Jesus, inasmuch as he himself 'was the ideal (i.e. the ideal became completely historical in him), and each historical moment of his experience at the same time bore within it the ideal' (Schleiermacher 1928: §§93 Thesis and 93.2). Schleiermacher's fundamental Christological claim, then, is that Jesus, unlike all others, had a perfectly potent God-consciousness, and that every moment of his life was perfectly harmonized with this consciousness.

To understand what this means, we need to understand, first, a consequence of Jesus's perfect God-consciousness, namely that Jesus's life reproduces (and so incarnates) the pure activity in which God eternally subsists. The argument here is straightforward enough: if (a) the consciousness of absolute dependence implies that the Whence of this dependence is purely active vis-à-vis the world (Schleiermacher 1928: §94.2, cf. §40.3); (b) this pure activity must be singular, for otherwise there would necessarily be passive elements mixed into it (Schleiermacher 1928: §40.3); and if (c) Jesus's perfect receptivity to this Whence governs his reception of and activity towards all sensible experience, then (d) the latter receptivity and activity are pure activity vis-à-vis the world, since they are conditioned not by the world but only by an absolute receptivity towards God, from which it follows that (e) Jesus' receptivity and activity reproduce, within the world, God's own activity. This explains Schleiermacher's assertion that Jesus is the only creature 'in which there is an existence of God in the proper sense, so far, that is, as we posit the God-consciousness in his self-consciousness as continually and exclusively determining every moment', or again, that 'every moment of his existence, so far as it can be isolated, presents just such a new incarnation and incarnatedness of God, because always and everywhere all that is human in him springs from the divine' (Schleiermacher 1928: §94.2, 96.3). It likewise explains what Schleiermacher has in mind when he claims that 'to ascribe to Christ an absolutely powerful God-consciousness, and to attribute to him an existence of God in him, are exactly the same thing', since his perfectly receptive God-consciousness ensures that every moment of Jesus's life reproduces, as his own, the pure activity in which God subsists.

The fact that Jesus incarnates this activity demonstrates, moreover, that the One upon whom we depend absolutely is not just any pure activity, but the activity of love; to be absolutely dependent, therefore, is to depend wholly upon God's love, and to let that love govern one's reception of and activity towards the world. The fact that love is the pure activity to which Jesus is perfectly receptive, and which his life therefore reproduces as his own pure activity vis-à-vis the world, becomes clear in Jesus's most apparently passive moments, most notably in his suffering. Schleiermacher thus remarks that:

> we find one passive condition posited as necessary, almost as constant, in Christ, so that in a sense all his actions depend upon it—namely, sympathy with the condition of men; yet at the same time in everything which proceeded from this we shall most distinctly recognize the impulse of the reconciling being of God in Christ.... Now this 'divine' is the divine love in Christ which, once and for all or in every moment—whichever expression be chosen—gave direction to his feelings for the spiritual conditions of men.
>
> (Schleiermacher 1928: §97.3)

Here, then, Jesus's passivity is precisely a reproduction of God's activity, and thus shows us that that activity is reconciling love. Nowhere is this clearer than in Jesus's crucifixion, for 'in his suffering unto death, occasioned by his steadfastness, there is manifested to us an absolutely self-denying love; and in this there is represented to us with perfect vividness the way in which God was in him to reconcile the world to himself' (Schleiermacher 1928: §104.4). Hence, if Jesus perfectly reproduces the pure activity in which God subsists, then it turns out that God subsists in the singular activity of reconciling love. In light of Jesus, therefore, we can see why 'love alone is made the equivalent of the being or essence of God' (Schleiermacher 1928: §167.1). On Schleiermacher's account, then, for Jesus's entire life to be taken up into God-consciousness is for it to be taken into consciousness of and devotion to God's reconciling love. We see this especially clearly, Schleiermacher claims, in Jesus's response to suffering and death, for these, too, are confronted simply as occasions for faithfulness to that love; 'it is in his suffering', accordingly, 'that we feel most perfectly how imperturbable was his blessedness' (Schleiermacher 1928: §104.4). Jesus's response to suffering thus manifests that which is true of his entire life, namely that he subordinates every moment of his sensible-consciousness to his consciousness of God's love. If so, this would mean, among other things, that there is a perfect epistemic fit between God and Jesus's consciousness of God, since he apprehends God as the One upon whose love all things depend.

With that, we return to the God-forgetful: as Schleiermacher sees it, they can be redeemed from their God-forgetfulness and, so, stand in a proper epistemic relationship to God, if and only if they apprehend God as Jesus did. Their redemption thus depends upon Jesus somehow communicating his God-consciousness to them, in such a way that it thereby becomes their own. Jesus accomplishes this, Schleiermacher argues, by drawing others into the activity of his life—he not only acts upon every circumstance of his own life, he also acts upon other persons, in such a way that his activity becomes theirs. Schleiermacher thus asserts that:

> the activity by which he assumes us into fellowship with him is a creative production in us of the will to assume him into ourselves, or rather—since it is only receptiveness for his activity as involved in the impartation—the creative production of our assent to the influence of his activity.
>
> (Schleiermacher 1928: §100.2)

More specifically, Schleiermacher argues that 'whatever in human nature is assumed into vital fellowship with Christ is assumed into the fellowship of an activity solely determined by the power of the God-consciousness, which God-consciousness is adequate to every new experience and extracting from it all it has to yield', and, therefore, that 'each assumption of this sort is simply a continuation of the same creative act which first manifested itself in time by the formation of Christ's person' (Schleiermacher 1928: §101.4). On this account, then, Jesus is perfectly receptive to God's pure act and perfectly reproduces it as his own action; in redeeming us, Christ makes us receptive to his receptivity so that it becomes ours. Schleiermacher argues, accordingly, that:

> in him the passivity of his human nature was nothing but a lively susceptibility to an absolutely powerful consciousness of God, accompanied by a desire to be thus seized and determined, which became changed through the creative act into a spontaneous

> activity constituting a personality. In the same way our desire is heightened in conversion by the self-communication of Christ till it becomes a spontaneous activity of the self that constitutes a coherent new life.
>
> (Schleiermacher 1928: §108.6)

For Schleiermacher, then, Jesus is perfectly receptive to God's reconciling love and perfectly reproduces it as his own, and in redeeming us, Jesus makes us receptive to his receptivity so that we, too, can receive and reproduce God's love.

There is, then, a sort of transitive property at work here, which Schleiermacher understands as (and, in turn, uses to explain) the work of Christ's Spirit. To explain how this works, Schleiermacher takes as his model Christ's disciples, since he sees in them exactly the transformation he is trying to explain, namely one where they were initially merely receptive to Christ, but were eventually transformed so that Christ's receptivity (and activity) became their own. Schleiermacher claims, accordingly, that the disciples first had to become susceptible to Christ's activity: 'in spending time together with Christ', he writes, 'the disciples' receptivity developed, and by perceiving what he held before them, a foundation was laid for their future effectiveness for the kingdom of God'. During their time with Christ, then, the disciples watched what Jesus said and did, and from this they began to learn what it meant to follow him. Through such training, the disciples grew in their susceptibility to Christ's influence, but his receptivity had not yet become their own, for they had not yet internalized this influence. A crucial step in their development occurred, therefore, when Jesus recognized them as competent to assess others' receptivity, since, Schleiermacher notes, 'the right binding and loosing of sin is essentially just an expression of a fully cultivated receptivity for what pertains to the kingdom of God' (Schleiermacher 1928: §122.1; note that Schleiermacher's argument here is based upon the connection drawn in the Johannine Pentecost between the conferral of the Spirit and the binding and loosing of sins). Jesus's recognition of the disciples' authority to bind and loose thus meant that the disciples had learned what it meant to follow him, which meant, in turn, that Jesus's influence on them was no longer merely external (Schleiermacher 1928: §122.3). This recognition also meant that the disciples were now in a position to confer this same recognition upon others, such that Jesus's influence was now fully transitive: the disciples had internalized Jesus's influence through becoming receptive to him, and once they had become sufficiently receptive, he recognized them as competent recognizers of such receptivity; once others had become sufficiently receptive, they too would be recognized as such, and so on.

From this, Schleiermacher extrapolates a more general model according to which a 'multifarious community of attunement' is carried on: first, those whose God-consciousness has been attuned to Christ express that attunement through their gestures, words, actions, and recognition-laden responses *to* such expressions; if others recognize these persons' expressions as properly receptive of Christ's influence, they may imitate them in similar circumstances until they have become reliably disposed to do so, at which point these expressions become part of their own attunement; still others may then recognize the latter's expressions as attuned to Christ, imitate those expressions, become reliably disposed to repeat them, and so on. In this way, the Spirit of Christ's own receptivity is carried forward through a chain of intersubjective recognition, and persons' lives are thereby reordered to God (cf. Schleiermacher 1928: §88.3). Those who have been sufficiently formed by, and who thus contribute to, the community founded by Jesus, are therefore new persons, for, as Schleiermacher writes:

> the pervasive activity of Christ cannot establish itself in an individual without becoming person-forming in him too, for now all his activities are differently determined through the working of Christ in him, and even all impressions are differently received—which means that the personal self-consciousness too becomes altogether different.
>
> (Schleiermacher 1928: §100.2)

The community founded by Jesus is the means, therefore, by which his God-consciousness is communicated to others; their reception of his God-consciousness would obviously liberate them from their God-forgetfulness, which is why Schleiermacher understands this as part of the redemptive activity of Jesus (Schleiermacher 1928: §100 Thesis).

For Schleiermacher, then, one stands in an epistemically fitting relationship to God only insofar as one apprehends God as the One upon whom all things, including oneself, depend absolutely. Our God-forgetfulness, however, means that we subordinate God-consciousness to sensible-consciousness, and so apprehend the latter as independent and, thus, apprehend God as otherwise than the One upon whom all things depend absolutely. (Theologically speaking, we have become epistemic misfits.) Schleiermacher therefore claims that we can apprehend God rightly if and only if we have been redeemed, and that God has accomplished this redemption through the Spirit's communication to us of Jesus's perfect God-consciousness. On Schleiermacher's account, accordingly, to stand in a proper epistemic relationship to God is to depend wholly upon God's redeeming love, and one's ability to do so is itself a product of that love. Epistemic fit, in other words, is a matter of justification by grace through faith.

Schleiermacher thus defends a theologically robust, independently plausible account of our would-be knowledge of God. Given the explosion of recent work on so-called Reformed epistemology, on the connection between epistemology and metaphysics, and on the priority of immediate, non-inferential knowledge to explicit, conscious knowledge, this account seems eminently worthy of further attention.

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# CHAPTER 33

# SØREN KIERKEGAARD

### M. G. PIETY

'*Everything is new in Christ*', wrote Kierkegaard in 1840. 'This will be my position for a speculative Christian epistemology' (Kierkegaard 1967–78, 2:2277). Kierkegaard never wrote the work on Christian epistemology that he had envisioned in 1840. It is tempting to conclude that this was because the mature Kierkegaard, whose first published works began to appear in 1843, had changed his mind about the possibility of Christian knowledge. Careful examination of his works reveals, however, that they are rich with references to such knowledge and the conditions that make it possible. The difficulty with understanding Kierkegaard's views on this issue is that he does not write in the manner traditional to philosophers. He communicates his thoughts most often indirectly, through dramatic characters, in the style of Plato, rather than directly in the style of Kant or Hegel. The purpose of this chapter is thus to lay bare the position on the nature of religious knowledge that appears to lie beneath the surface of Kierkegaard's works and provides the foundation for his views on the nature of Christian existence.

Kierkegaard's primary interest was not epistemology, at least not in the traditional sense. Unfortunately, this has blinded many scholars to the importance epistemology had for him. The prominence of epistemological concerns in Kierkegaard's works was not lost, however, on his contemporaries. Both the Danish theologian Hans Lassen Martensen (Martensen 1849) and the Danish philosopher Rasmus Nielsen (Nielsen 1849) considered at least one kind of knowledge—that is, religious knowledge—to be Kierkegaard's primary concern.

But is 'religious knowledge' different from other types of knowledge? Philosophers tend to be reductionist in that they take the various senses in which we use the expression 'knowledge' and try to produce a single definition that will cover them all. Such definitions inevitably fail to do this, however, with the result that it looks like much of what in ordinary contexts we claim to 'know', we may not in fact know. Kierkegaard, in contrast, is an epistemological pluralist. According to his view, knowledge can take a variety of forms (see Piety 2010). But all knowledge ultimately rests on some kind of faith. Thus the German Kierkegaard scholar Martin Slotty refers to Kierkegaard as an 'epistemologist of belief' (Slotty 1915). Not all faith is the same, however. If the knowledge in question is objective (e.g. of the scholarly or scientific sort), then the faith on which it is based would be in something like the presuppositions of rational thought, the axioms of arithmetic, the reality of physical substance, or the reliability of the information we receive through our senses. More generally, objective knowledge could be said to rest on a Cartesian-like confidence that though we are often mistaken, our senses and cognitive faculties do not systematically mislead us about the nature of reality.

There is much evidence that Kierkegaard was impressed with the achievements of the sciences of his day, but his primary interest was in religion, not science. Most today still think of Kierkegaard as a sceptic. They are wrong. There is a great deal of religious knowledge according to Kierkegaard, and the foundation of this knowledge is, in fact, firmer than is the foundation of almost all other knowledge, with the exception of that attainable in mathematics.

In order to understand Kierkegaard's position on the nature of religious knowledge, we need first to look at his views on knowledge more generally.

There are two basic, or overarching categories of knowledge, according to Kierkegaard: objective knowledge (*den objective Viden*) and subjective knowledge (*den subjective Viden*) (Kierkegaard 2009a: 169). Knowledge is 'objective' if it is not essentially related to the existence of the knower (e.g. scholarly and scientific knowledge). Knowledge is 'subjective' if it *is* essentially related to the existence of the knower (e.g. ethical and religious knowledge requires the knower to conform his existence to it).

All knowledge, according to Kierkegaard, is the result of 'reality' (*Realitet*) having been brought into relation to 'ideality' (Kierkegaard 1976–78 1:891). Knowledge of the propositional sort is a representation of reality in the abstract categories of thought, which is unproblematic when the 'reality' in question is itself abstract (e.g. mathematics). It is problematic, however, when the reality in question is concrete (e.g. empirical sciences). Knowledge in the empirical sciences is never better than an 'approximation' (see Kierkegaard 2009a: 32, 35n. 36, 68, and Piety 2010: 71–94). While it makes 'progress' in describing reality in the sense that it presents increasingly adequate descriptions of it, there is no a priori reason to assume it is actually getting closer to the true nature of reality. Religious knowledge, however, is different. It is possible to approach religious truth, and to attain a kind of certainty regarding it that can otherwise be had only in mathematics.

There are numerous references in Kierkegaard's works to 'the Christianity of the New Testament'. Kierkegaard refers, as well, in *Works of Love* to 'original Christianity' (*oprindelig Christendom*; Kierkegaard 1995; *SKS* 9, 179). These references are clearly to Christianity in the period of the apostles and of the early church. Kierkegaard contrasts this period with the Christianity of his own day, which had strayed so far from what Christianity was originally meant to be that he refers to it pejoratively as 'Christendom' and argues that it is Christian in name only.

What, for Kierkegaard, was this 'original Christianity' really like? Did it affirm that it was possible to know God? I am going to show that it did. In fact, I am going to argue that Kierkegaard's views on the possibility of religious, and even specifically Christian, knowledge mirror almost exactly those of two church fathers, Irenaeus and Clement of

Alexandria. The similarity between Kierkegaard's views and the views of these two ante-Nicene thinkers is, in fact, so strong that I believe it is a result of Kierkegaard's attempt to develop an epistemology that was consistent with the doctrines of the early church, doctrines to which Kierkegaard gained exposure not simply through his readings of the church fathers, but also through his readings of German mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler.

## MYSTICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

'It is characteristic of mystics', writes Edward Scribner Ames, 'to claim for themselves a kind of knowledge or illumination different from ordinary sensuous or reasoned knowledge' (Ames 1915: 250). Mystical knowledge is thus not a product of the sorts of processes that ordinarily lead to knowledge. It does not come from sense perception, from reasoning, or from scientific experiments. Such sources of knowledge typically lead only to provisional conclusions. But the mystic wants absolute conclusions, not provisional ones. The mystic thus 'employs the common processes only in order to deny them, to transcend them' (Ames 1915: 250).

Mystics are not 'troubled by the question of the existence or the reality of God'. The passion of the mystic is, rather, 'to *find* God, to ascend to his presence, to enter into communion with him' (emphasis in original). The craving of the mystic is 'to secure a vital and satisfying relation with the supreme reality'. Yet to the extent that the supreme reality 'is in no way conditioned':

> [n]ot only is the goal of his endeavor unintelligible but the method by which he proposes to reach it is non-intellectual.... [M]ystic illumination cannot be scientifically nor systematically induced. The subject of it receives it passively. After doing his utmost to earn it, or achieve it, the greatest need is that he shall be passive and receptive.
>
> (Ames 1915: 254, 256, 261)

In order to understand how such 'passivity' and 'receptivity' can lead to knowledge, we need to look briefly at what scholars have argued are two different approaches to understanding what it means to know something. The first sees knowledge as a kind of reconstruction or mirror image of reality in the mind of the knower. This view is generally recognized as characteristic of modernity. There is an older view, however, that interprets knowledge as involving substantial contact with reality—a coming together, so to speak, of the knower and the thing known. This view finds expression, for example, in the wax metaphor of the mind from Plato's *Theatetus* where the things known impress themselves upon the mind of the knower (191c–d).

For Plato the ultimate objective of the knower was union with 'the good'. But this idea is not original to Plato. 'The idea of Divine Union as man's true end', observes Evelyn

Underhill, ‘is … of great antiquity. Its first appearance in the religious consciousness of Europe seems to coincide with the Orphic Mysteries in Greece and Southern Italy in the sixth century B.C.’ (Underhill 1911: 28n. 20). What Plato did was to connect the idea of such union with knowledge.

The view that to know something was to have a kind of contact with it was appropriated by Aristotle and spread to such early Christian thinkers as Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus, who were heavily influenced by the works of both Plato and Aristotle. ‘The most important aspect of Clement’s philosophy’, writes Salvatore R. C. Lilla, ‘is represented by the idea of *gnosis* [knowledge]’ (Lilla 1971: 118). ‘[T]he idea of *gnosis*’, he continues, ‘is in Clement’s thought, closely connected with that of *pistis* [faith]’ (Lilla 1971: 119). Man’s aim, according to Clement, ‘is to know God, to have knowledge of God (γνῶσις τοῦ Θεοῦ): “We call upon man” ’, writes Clement, ‘ “who was made for the contemplation of heaven, and is in truth a heavenly plant, to come to knowledge of God” ’ (Protr. 100.3, in Hägg 2006: 151).

There are two respects, however, in which one can ‘know’ God. Close examination of the writings of Irenaeus, one of the earliest of the church fathers, reveals that he believes the idea of God is built into human consciousness. God, according to Irenaeus:

> confers on all a great mental intuition and perception of His most mighty, yes, almighty greatness. Therefore, though ‘no one knows the Father except the Son, nor the Son except the Father, and those to whom the Son has revealed Him’ (cf. Mt. 11:27), yet *all beings* know this fact at least [i.e. that there is a God] because reason, implanted in their minds, moves them, and reveals to them that there is one God, the Lord of all.
>
> (Irenaeus 1990: 32, emphasis added)

That is, ‘[c]reation’, according to Irenaeus, ‘shows its Creator, and what is made suggests its Maker’ (Irenaeus 1990: 33). One need only be a ‘lover of truth’, according to Irenaeus, in order to see this.

This innate knowledge that there is a God is not, however, specifically Christian and it is specifically Christian knowledge in which the church fathers are interested. Christianity has always emphasized the primacy of faith relative to knowledge. This does not mean, however, that there was no such thing as specifically Christian knowledge in the early church. Sin, according to the Christian tradition, separates human beings from God, but faith in Christ reunites them. The possibility of specifically Christian knowledge is part of the earliest Christian orthodoxy. The foundation of such knowledge, however, is faith—πίστις. ‘[T]he two cannot be separated: “Now neither is knowledge without faith, nor faith without knowledge (ἤδη δὲ οὔτε ἡ γνῶσις ἄνευ πίστεως οὔθ’ἡ πίστις ἄνευ γνώσεως)” ’ (*Strom*. 5.1.3 in Hägg 2006: 151). Or, as Wilhelm Scherer expresses it: ‘Ihm steht es von vornherein fest, das sich die Ergebnisse des Gnosis nicht von der Regel des Glaubens entfernen können’ (It is clear to him from the outset that the products of knowledge cannot be separated from the rule of faith) (Scherer 1907: 70).

But how does faith result in knowledge? Ames correctly claims that 'mystic illumination cannot be scientifically nor systematically induced', that the subject 'receives' it passively, after doing his utmost to earn it, or achieve it' (Ames 1915: 261). Faith is a gift of Grace to those who seek earnestly to attain it. It is the 'condition for understanding the truth' (*Sandheds Betingelsen*) that one who has surrendered his understanding receives from 'the god', and which then 'conditions' (i.e. changes) his understanding of the truth (Kierkegaard 2009b: 92).

## KIERKEGAARD ON RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

### Knowledge of God

Kierkegaard, like other thinkers in the mystical tradition, is not 'troubled by the question of the existence or the reality of God' (Ames 1915: 254). He believes, like the church fathers and the German mystics, that the idea of God is somehow built into human consciousness. Arild Christensen argues that Kierkegaard 'emphasizes that God is present in human consciousness' (Christensen 1962: 59), and Kierkegaard refers in *Fear and Trembling* to human beings as having an 'eternal consciousness' that he associates with the love of God (Kierkegaard 1983: 48). It would appear Kierkegaard believes the view that there is a God is simply part of the way consciousness is constructed. It may be associated with a person's appreciation that his is a finite, or limited, form of rationality (meaning that there are things that transcend his understanding), or it may be the expression of a kind of Schleiermachean feeling of absolute dependence.

'Eternally understood', asserts Kierkegaard in *Philosophical Crumbs*, 'one does not *believe* that there is a God, even though one assumes that there is. This is a misuse of language. Socrates did not have faith that there was a God. What he knew about God he achieved through recollection' (Kierkegaard 2009b: 153, emphasis in original). This reference to recollection recurs in Kierkegaard's journals where he observes that both proving that there is a God, and being convinced of this by proofs, are 'equally fantastic':

> for just as no one has ever proven it, so has there never been an atheist, even though there certainly have been many who have been unwilling to let what they knew get control of their minds.... With respect to the existence [*Tilværelsen*] of God, immortality, etc., in short with respect to all problems of immanence, recollection applies; it exists altogether in everyone only he does not know it.
>
> (Kierkegaard 1967–78, 3:3606)

It makes sense that Kierkegaard would have felt no need to defend the view that the idea of God is simply part of the contents of human consciousness. This view, as we have seen, is characteristic of the earliest Christian orthodoxy. It is also part of the later Christian mystical tradition. Both Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler hold, in keeping with the views of the church fathers, that a kind of natural religious knowledge (i.e. knowledge outside of revelation) is possible. Eckhart speaks, for example, of 'the natural light of the rational soul' as conveying knowledge of religious truth (see 'The Book of Divine Consolation', in Eckhart 1994: 58). The reference to 'an inward sight' that bears a striking resemblance to Irenaeus's 'mental intuition', occurs also in *Theologia Deutsch*. This 'inward sight', asserts the anonymous author of *Theolgia Deutsch*, is 'able to perceive the one true good'. Tauler himself, also, refers to knowledge of God that 'springeth from within'.

## Christian Knowledge

I have argued that, for Kierkegaard, the idea of God, under certain circumstances, amounts to knowledge that there is a God. Such knowledge is a long way, however, from specifically *Christian* knowledge (Piety 2010). Some have argued that there is no specifically Christian knowledge according to Kierkegaard (see e.g. Emmanuel 1991). It is clear, however, from Kierkegaard's journals, that there *is* such knowledge according to him. I have defended this claim in detail and will not attempt to recapitulate that argument here. I will provide only a sketch of the nature of Christian knowledge according to Kierkegaard that will make clear the similarity between Kierkegaard's views and those of the church fathers and of the Christian mystical tradition more generally.

I observed in the previous subsection that while it is characteristic of modernity to view knowledge as a representation of reality, there was an older tradition that viewed knowledge as involving substantial contact with reality. Christian knowledge, for Kierkegaard, has this latter character in that it involves an encounter between the knower and the truth.

All knowledge, for Kierkegaard, is a result of reality having been brought into relation to ideality. There are two ways, however, in which this can be done. Reality can be represented in the abstract, or ideal categories of thought, or ideality can be brought into relation to reality by coming to concrete expression in the life of the knower. The first type of relation is exemplified in scholarly and scientific knowledge, where the knower represents concrete reality in conceptual terms. The second type of relation is exemplified in religious knowledge. Even natural religious knowledge, or the simple knowledge that there is a God, has this character because of the implications it has for the life of the knower. Though I have examined this issue in detail (Piety 2010), I will restrict the focus here to Christian knowledge and the respect in which it, in order to be legitimately called 'knowledge', requires expression in the life of the knower. Such a view is not original to Kierkegaard. Like the views already discussed concerning natural religious knowledge, the view that specifically Christian knowledge is inseparable from its expression in the life of the knower is part of a mystical tradition that reaches back to the very beginnings of the church. Before we can examine the character of this knowledge, however, we need to look at how it is attained.

What Kierkegaard calls 'contemporaneousness' (Kierkegaard 2009b: 163) with 'the god in time' makes it possible for a person to 'know' God in the person of Christ. This 'contemporaneousness', which is accessible to both someone who is historically contemporary with Christ, and to someone who comes later, would appear to be equivalent to what Ames identifies as the 'communion' with God that the mystic seeks. It is thus possible, according to Kierkegaard, to 'know' the truth, or to recognize Christ as the truth, through this 'contemporaneousness', or communion. God did not take on human form 'to ridicule human beings. His intention cannot thus be to go through the world in such a way that not a single person ever came to know [vide] it. He does indeed want something of himself to be understood [forstaae]' (Kierkegaard 2009b: 126). This passage from *Crumbs* is strikingly similar to Irenaeus's claim in *Against the Heresies* that 'the Lord did not say that the Father and the Son could not be known at all [μὴ γινώσκεσθαι] for in that case his coming would have been pointless' (Irenaeus 1990: 45). Irenaeus is concerned here to reject the claim of the gnostic Valentinus that the message of the incarnation was God's inaccessibility to human knowledge. 'What the Lord really taught', asserts Irenaeus, 'is this: no one can know God unless God teaches him'. The view that knowledge of God is 'taught' by Christ is also central to the doctrines of Clement of Alexandria. Thus, Clement, like Kierkegaard, refers to God as a 'teacher' (see, for example Clement 1885: Bk V, Ch. 1). These views of Irenaeus and Clement are reflected in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Crumbs* when he asks whether 'the truth' can 'be taught' (Kierkegaard 2009b: 88). His answer, of course, is yes—if God *himself* teaches it.

Faith is the means through which Christ 'teaches' the truth. The substantive view of epistemology, expressed in the idea that faith can bring the believer into a kind of contact with God in the person of Christ that results in knowledge of God, found its way into the thought of such medieval Christian thinkers as Johannes Scottus Eriugena, and eventually to the German mystics. Meister Eckhart asserts, for example, that '[i]n faith alone do we have true knowledge' (Eckhart 1994: 36). Tauler also refers to 'the light of faith' as leading to 'knowledge of God' (Tauler 1886: 264).

Despite Eckhart's view that human beings have a kind of innate religious knowledge, he asserts that '[i]f you wish to know God in a divine manner, then your knowing must become a pure unknowing, a forgetting of yourself' (Eckhart 1994: 224). 'Where you truly go out of your will and your knowledge', he asserts, 'God truly and willingly enters in with his knowledge and shines there with great brilliance' (Eckhart 1994: 223). That is, you must surrender your understanding to God, according to Eckhart, and then God in turn will bestow on you the gift of faith that leads to 'divine knowledge'. This faith represents, again, a kind of union with God that leads to true knowledge.

'[M]an by nature', observes Tauler, 'desireth to know [Wissen] all created things, and the distinction that he perceives in them is given to him by his natural knowledge [Wissen]. And to know begets in him great pleasure, and the pleasure driveth him on to know more and more' (Tauler 1886: 46). '[N]atural knowledge [Bekenntnisse]', according to Tauler, 'is not to be denied … for natural knowledge [Bekenntnisse], if he be willing, leadeth a man into knowledge of grace, and knowledge of grace leadeth him to divine knowledge' (Tauler 1886: 45). This knowledge is a product of Grace and the ultimate objective of the Christian. It is the end towards which he strives even in his progress through natural knowledge.

Natural knowledge does not of itself produce knowledge of Grace. It merely leads the seeker to the limit of the unaided, or un-illuminated, understanding. Knowledge *of* Grace is achieved *through* Grace, which is to say, through the gift of faith and the subsequently illuminated understanding that comes to a new knowledge of religious truth. '[T]o man in a state of grace', asserts Tauler:

> is given the power of distinguishing the Holy Scriptures, so that he comprehend them in full truth, and that in bearing and reading he should understand them in the best and most profitable way. And this knowledge [Verstentnisse] is by grace and not from nature; for by mere nature you cannot come to true knowledge [Bekentnisse] of the Holy Scriptures. For the Holy Scriptures are from the Holy Ghost, and therefore whoso wisheth to understand them properly he must be enlightened with the grace of the Holy Ghost.
>
> (Tauler 1886: 48)

'We are placed in this life', according to Tauler, 'not only to do the works, but also so that we may know, so that our works may grow out of knowledge, as fruit grows out of the tree. Therefore our work in this life is to gain more knowledge, and so to come nearer to God'. We will see in what follows that Kierkegaard also views Christian knowledge as bringing the knower closer to (*nærmere til*) God.

Propositional knowledge is the primary interest of contemporary epistemologists. It appears, however, that in every instance where Kierkegaard refers to 'knowledge' of Christ, the Danish expression is either '*Kjendskab*', or some form of the verb '*kjende*' (see, for example, Kierkegaard 1992: 325–6 and Kierkegaard 2009b: 136–7). These terms are more appropriately understood as referring to acquaintance knowledge than to propositional knowledge. There is even at least one place where Kierkegaard alters the then current Danish translation of the New Testament by replacing the expression 'know' (*kiende*), in connection with the truth of Christianity, with 'experience' (*Erfaring*). The reference is from his papers where he quotes John 7:17 as 'If anyone's will is to do my father's will, he shall *experience* [*erfarer*] whether the teaching is from God or on my own authority' (Kierkegaard 1967–78, 2:1881, emphasis added). This substitution provides us with a key to understanding Kierkegaard's assertion that '[t]he historical anticipation of and also the position in human consciousness corresponding to the Christian "*Credo ut intelligam*" [I believe in order that I might understand] is the ancient *Nihil est in intellectus quod non antea fuerit in sensu* [There is nothing in the intellect that has not previously been in the senses]' (Kierkegaard 1967–78, 2:1098). That is, one must encounter God in the person of Christ, must attain acquaintance knowledge of God first, through this encounter, before one can attain any other sort of knowledge of God.

A person meets Christ, according to Kierkegaard, in the moment of faith. This meeting results in 'knowledge' of Christ. This knowledge is precisely the *gnosis* of the church fathers, the *gnosis* (knowledge) that is based on *pistis* (belief or faith). According to

Kierkegaard, acquaintance knowledge of Christ, attained through this encounter, or communion with Christ, precedes Christian knowledge in the propositional sense, just as for Clement an 'august knowledge of the truth' may be built 'on the foundation of faith' (Clement 1885: Bk V, Ch. 1). To become acquainted with Christ is thus an experience that is related to the intellect in a manner analogous to the way *sense* experience is related to the intellect for both Kierkegaard and Clement.

Experience, according to Kierkegaard, belongs to the realm of existence, or actuality, hence it cannot, in itself, be equivalent to propositional knowledge. Experience becomes knowledge, or a candidate for knowledge, when it is brought into relation to ideality in the intellect. Hence Christian knowledge, in the propositional sense, is a consequence of, rather than equivalent to, Christian experience. 'Knowing the truth', is not equivalent to being the truth, but is something that '*follows* of itself from being the truth' (Kierkegaard 1991: 205).

But what does it mean to be acquainted with Christ? God in the person of Christ is 'indistinguishable' (*ikke til at skjelne*) from other people. He cannot be known immediately, but can be 'seen' only in the metaphorical sense, which is to say, only with 'the eyes of faith' (Kierkegaard 2009b: 126, 132, 134). This, according to Choufrine in *Gnosis, Theophany, and Theosis*, is also Clement's position. That is, Clement refers to what he calls 'the visual faculty of the soul' (Clement 1885: Bk V, Ch. 1). It is with this faculty, with the love that 'allies' the faithful through the agency of divine love to God in the person of Christ, that we are able to 'see' that Christ is the truth (Choufrine 2002: 113, 116).

Knowledge of the truth, according to Kierkegaard again, *follows* from *being t*he truth, which is to say that it follows from the belief that God is love, a belief which is itself an expression of love, or of gratitude towards God for the revelation that one's sins are forgiven. This is also Clement's position according to Choufrine. 'The starting point for Gnosis', Choufrine explains, is 'a direct and sudden experience of redemption, which has been neither felt as needed, nor contemplated as a goal, but is a realization of an absolutely unknown possibility' (Choufrine 2002: 36). Knowledge of the truth, for both Clement and Kierkegaard, is a product of faith, or of a faithful life. Hence Hägg argues that for Clement, 'a gnostic is a person whose gnosis is demonstrated through his activities: "The gnostic … being on the one hand not without a knowledge of God (or rather being known by him) and on the other hand showing the effects thereof …. For works (τὰ ἔργα) follow knowledge as the shadow the body" ' (Hägg 2006: 152).

Knowledge is *distinguished* from the truth itself, or from a way of being. To argue, however, that knowledge is distinguishable from the activity that makes it possible does not mean that it may be separated from this activity. Specifically Christian knowledge, like all of what Kierkegaard refers to as 'subjective knowledge', is essentially prescriptive. It is impossible to separate it from a certain way of life. The same, again, is true for Clement. According to Hägg, 'Gnosis', for Clement:

> may be seen as a twofold thing: it is on the one hand, a subject matter and, on the other, a way or process…. [Hence] [t]o have knowledge of God is to be part of a *process*, leading from faith via gnosis to the love of God. Faith and love represent the beginning and the end of this *process*.
>
> (Hägg 2006: 151, emphasis added)

Or as Kierkegaard expresses it:

> The being of truth is not the *direct* redoubling of being in relation to thinking, which gives only thought-being … [I]t is the redoubling of truth within yourself, within me, within him, so that your life, my life, his life … [is] approximately [*Tilnærmelsesvis*] the being of truth in the striving for it.
>
> (Kierkegaard 1991: 205, emphasis added)

That is, 'knowledge' of the truth of Christianity cannot be separated from the process of striving to bring that truth to expression in one's own existence.

Christian striving is different, however, from what one could call the 'striving' of scholars and scientists, because even though scholarly and scientific theories progress in the sense that they explain more and more of the phenomena we wish to explain, scholars and scientists have no way of knowing whether their theories are actually getting closer to the true nature of reality. When Kierkegaard refers to scholarly and scientific knowledge as an 'approximation', the word he uses is '*Approximation*'. When, on the other hand, he refers to Christian knowledge as an 'approximation', the term he uses is '*Tilnærmelse*'. '*Tilnærmelse*' is composed of two separate Danish expressions. The first is '*Nærmelse*'. The reader likely recognizes the '*nær*' in '*Nærmelse*' as a cognate of the English 'near'. The second term is the preposition '*til*' which means 'to'. Hence '*Tilnærmelse*' literally means 'to come closer to', or 'to approach'. So like the German mystic Johannes Tauler, Kierkegaard asserts that 'knowing' God and coming 'nearer' to God are inextricably linked.

Scholars and scientists have not seen the truth they are striving to instantiate in their theories, but believers have. The Christian, according to Kierkegaard, 'knows' the truth towards which he strives. He has encountered this truth in the person of Christ. He has experienced 'contemporaneousness', or 'communion' with it. This truth has impressed itself upon him in a manner analogous to the way in which Plato asserts that things known impress themselves on the mind of the knower. The believer has been shaped, reformed, by his encounter with the truth so that now he knows the direction his striving must take and the end towards which it is directed. He knows this through faith.

## Conclusion

I am not the first person to recognize mystical elements in Kierkegaard's philosophy. The Slovakian scholar Peter Sajda has written three pioneering articles on this topic (see Sajda 2008a, 2008b, and 2009). Martin Luther admired Tauler and the mystical work *Theologia Deutsch*. Many saw mystical emphasis on subjectivity and the authority of inner experience as precursory to the Reformation. Some of Kierkegaard's Lutheran sources, according to Sajda, 'argued that the teachings of the mystics conformed to the [Protestant] *sola fide* principle' (Sajda 2009: 570).

Kierkegaard's exposure to German mysticism was not limited to its transmission through theological works. Medieval German mysticism was popular among German idealist philosophers and was discussed in works Kierkegaard owned and read including Adolf Helfferich's *Die christliche Mystik* (Helfferich 1842) and Hans Lassen Martensen's monograph: *Meister Eckhart, Et Bidrag til at oplyse Middelalderens Mystik* (*Meister Eckhart: A Contribution to the Understanding of Medieval Mysticism*) (Martensen 1840).

Nor was Kierkegaard's exposure to German mysticism primarily indirect, through its influence on the Pietists and German idealists. Kierkegaard owned a number of original works by mystics such as Tauler and Suso. He owned a copy of *Theologia Deutsch* as well as the aforementioned work by Martensen that included much original material from Eckhardt. Kierkegaard's library also included scholarly studies on mysticism that he read and commented upon. There are relatively few references to either Irenaeus or Clement of Alexandria in Kierkegaard's journals so it is difficult to say how broad Kierkegaard's exposure was to their works. The similarities among their views is so striking, however, that I believe they must have been among the thinkers Kierkegaard had in mind when he referred to 'original Christianity' (Kierkegaard 1995).

I have provided a sketch of Kierkegaard's position on the nature of religious, and more specifically Christian, knowledge. Kierkegaard never produced a work on Christian epistemology. This was not because he was ambivalent about the possibility of an epistemology based on faith. Rather, his primary interest as an author was addressing the problem of how *rare* the faith is that would be prerequisite to such knowledge. My goal was thus not to argue that Kierkegaard ought to be thought of primarily as a religious epistemologist, but merely to show that he *has* such an epistemology and that it is entirely consistent with a Christian tradition that goes back through German mysticism all the way to the doctrines of the church fathers.

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# CHAPTER 34

# JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

## CYRIL O'REGAN

The nature of faith and reason and their proper relation was a preoccupation of Newman throughout his long writing career, beginning with his *Oxford University Sermons* and carrying on long after the publication of *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. Newman's *Theses de Fide* and his *Philosophical Papers* would also have to be entered into evidence regarding a comprehensive assessment. Nonetheless, there are good reasons to think that the *University Sermons* and the *Grammar* are justifiably privileged in that they show clearly Newman's defence of religious belief as a form of knowing and his concomitant rejection of a Lockean religious epistemology with its universalistic pretensions.

Accordingly, it makes sense to focus on these two classic sites of Newman's religious epistemology, and offer an analysis that spells out their relative continuity and discontinuity. While such a presentation may be a necessary condition for including Newman in the canon of modern religious epistemology, it hardly proves sufficient. At the very least what is also needed is (a) some consideration of Newman's influence in subsequent religious thought both inside and outside Catholic philosophical and theological circles, and a sketch of more recent accounts of religious epistemology which either directly comment on him or are aware of his contribution; and (b), not unrelatedly, some consideration of the religious epistemological problems Newman failed to solve and others that he generated. These two considerations make up the second section of this chapter.

Newman's religious epistemology is *sui generis*, interventionist, and traditional. It evinces a makeshift quality, given that he is not a philosopher either by training or inclination. Newman routinely avails of categories of analysis and distinction as he finds them and develops and reinterprets them to serve his own particular epistemological agenda. His religious epistemology is also constitutively interventionist. While this characteristic is hardly sufficient to distinguish Newman from a number of other modern exponents of religious epistemology (e.g. Locke, Kant), nonetheless, it is a discrimen. Not all varieties of modern religious epistemology are interventionist in the sense that the constitutive anxiety is whether and how thought in general or religious thought in particular survives sceptical attack. While it might be thought that the *sui generis* quality of Newman's religious epistemology would bar any attribution of 'traditional' to his particular contribution, this does not have to be the case. In fact, Newman's criticism of Locke is framed within the context of the British naturalist tradition. Thinkers in this tradition objected to the absoluteness of Locke's distinction between certainty and probability, and exploited concessions in Locke's religious epistemology concerning moral certainty or the unreasonableness of doubt (see Ferreira 1986). Along these lines, Newman concludes that Locke's conception of rationality is inadequate insofar as it does not square with how the natural constitution of the human mind operates within real-world environments, and thus it is insufficiently empirical.

## ANALYSIS OF THE *UNIVERSITY SERMONS* AND THE *GRAMMAR OF ASSENT*

In both of these texts the concern is with a universalistic method whose purpose is to vet and sort out beliefs that can be justified from those that cannot. Newman's basic intuition is that the priority given to justification is misplaced, and that issues of justification concerning religious belief are either entirely beside the point (stronger thesis) or decidedly secondary (weaker thesis). While it is difficult to decide in general which of these two opinions is the more typically Newmanian, on balance it is better to think of Newman supporting the weaker thesis. There is a place in knowing for publicly adducible first principles and formal inference (see *US* 275), but they should not be thought to enjoy unrestricted application over entire domains of human experience (e.g. the political, social, ethical, and religious).

From the point of view of religious epistemology, not all of the *University Sermons* are equally important. One is thus compelled to agree with Frederick Aquino that sermons 10–14 are truly important both from the point of view of their influence on the *Grammar* and their relative precision in defining the terms 'faith' and 'reason' and their relationship (Aquino 2004: 14–15). The five lectures can be further subdivided into sets of two, with sermons 10, 11, and 13 arguing that faith and reason are distinct forms of knowing, and with sermons 12 and 14 defending faith from its association with superstition and fanaticism, an association imprinted in the social imagination since the seventeenth century, a major motive in the construction of Locke's religious epistemology, and a presumed rationale for the policing of faith well into the nineteenth century (see Wolterstorff 1996). In making his argument that faith as well as reason is a form of knowing, Newman is obliged to define reason and redefine faith. The definition of reason he provides is more historical than analytic. His age, he complains, is the age of evidences (*US* 197); reason, in this sense, requires compiling evidence and adjudicating whether such evidence for Christian belief is sufficiently immune to responsible doubt. Locke, for Newman, has provided the basic outline of evidentialism for the modern age, even if there are variations of Locke's actual model. That Newman is being provoked by a particular inflection of evidentialism comes through in his insistence on the 'formal' nature of reason. He includes Locke (also Whately and Paley) under the designation of 'formal'. Now 'formal' is not only a descriptor of a particular operation of reason, but also a critical evaluation suggesting that reason is that form of knowing at one remove at least from cognitive contact with states of affairs in the world and thus disconnected from action which provides both the context and issue of most forms of genuine knowing. Newman's construction of formal and explicit reason is thoroughly interventionist. His highly polemical sermons are calculated to chasten the imperialism of Locke's epistemology and evidentialism more broadly.

When speaking of faith in sermons 10, 11, and 13, Newman does so in two different registers; the first, a phenomenological or descriptive register (Aquino 2004: 23; Ferreira 1986 also uses this phrasing quite generically), and the second a religious, even biblical, register. In the first register, faith is synonymous with believing, and believing is a form of knowing based on presumption or antecedent probability rather than on demonstration. As such, faith operates implicitly rather than explicitly, holistically rather than analytically, and judges abruptly rather than moves to conclusion through a measured and deliberate process of arguing from premises to conclusion. Now to say that the first and primary register is phenomenological–descriptive is to say that epistemologically Newman allies himself with the naturalist tradition in that his interest lies in the actual process of belief formation (*US* 254; Aquino 2004: 22, 38). The observable process of belief formation shows how our minds actually work and thus provides critical leverage against evidentialism. Despite touting its empirical orientation, evidentialism is too prescriptive, narrow, and abstract. Then there is the second register—religious, even biblical. Newman freely mixes theological with phenomenological–descriptive language to make the point about the distinctiveness of faith vis-à-vis reason when he speaks in sermons 10 and 11 about faith having a supernatural origin. In due course Newman comes to see that to mix the theological with the phenomenological–descriptive is to come dangerously close to a *petitio principii*. While the rationalism of William Froude represents the proximate context for the production of Newman's definitive articulation of his religious epistemology in the *Grammar*, one can also see how it is generated in response to the unhappy relation between the general phenomenology of belief and its theological sanction in his earlier efforts to provide a convincing religious epistemology.

Sermons 12 and 14 complement 10, 11, and 13 by dealing with the problems of presumption raised by rationalists in the Lockean tradition. They are concerned not only with superstition but also with the slippery slope that leads from superstition (a belief that is not-possible, maybe impossible, to justify), through fanaticism, and finally to violence. The root problem is a faulty epistemology and in consequence a flawed religious epistemology. Newman's argument proceeds along two lines. First he questions the putative oddness of faith based on presumption and antecedent probability; second he argues against the need for reason to critically assess how dangerous presumption might be for ecclesial polity and indeed for the body politic. Sermons 12 and 14 offer a defence of presumption that neither requires investigation nor justifies censure. Faith or belief, like most of our pre-philosophical knowing, does not elucidate all the elements that cumulatively factor into belief formation. And this rather than the ascetic scruple of the Enlightenment philosopher, preoccupied with the ethics of belief, ought to be given sanction. Presumption, therefore, cannot be regarded as a poisoned root of knowing, but rather its condition. Second, faith, as based on antecedent presumption, does not need critical reason to supervise and safeguard it from becoming fanatical.

Although Newman believes that the rumours of Christian fanaticism are wildly exaggerated, he acknowledges that sometimes presumption (or antecedent probability) gives way to prejudice in the pejorative sense. The basic defences against this slide, however, are internal to Christianity itself. Love (Sermon 12) and wisdom (Sermons 12 and 14) are the terms that Newman uses to indicate a holistic process of knowing, inflected in such a way as to discourage bigotry. There is a particular attitudinal set or habit that defines how Christians hold their belief that would inhibit the tendency to condemn, exclude, and harm those who hold different or contrary beliefs. Needless to say, both of these terms have a definite theological as well as non-theological register. This is evinced by the biblical citations that introduce and frame these constructs. Of the two terms, 'wisdom' is more adaptable in that it suggests a mode of reasoning beyond the discursive that has both theological and philosophical or more specifically Augustinian and Aristotelian precedents. In the case of the former, there is the distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia*; in the case of Aristotle the distinction between theoretical and practical reason, where the latter prioritizes judgement, especially judgement as it issues from a background of experience and prior judgement. It would not be unfair to say that even in this relatively early stage of Newman's reflections on religious epistemology he is sketching something like a social epistemology (see Aquino 2004).

The *Grammar* continues, develops, and exceeds the religious epistemology of the *University Sermons*. In line with the *University Sermons* the *Grammar* argues that religious belief is analogous in significant ways to the ordinary belief in relying on presumption or antecedent probability in taking something to be the case. And as there is no need to adopt the sceptical posture regarding the latter, neither is the recourse to scepticism justified with regard to religious beliefs. Newman is convinced that we should give sanction to the normal workings of the mind in religious as well as non-religious affairs, which entails describing how human beings come to believe. Such description brings out the naturalness of belief and assists in making it appear reasonable (Aquino 2004: 51–2, 58–60). As Newman argued for the value of implicit over explicit reason in *the University Sermons*, similarly in the *Grammar* he argues for the value of assent over inference, on the one hand, and informal inference over formal inference, on the other hand. Moreover, Newman's appeal is to our standard epistemic behaviour, the observable redundancy in belief of any sort, and the recognized connection of belief with action, both in terms of context and flow. The last point is especially important to Newman. One of the main weaknesses of the rationalist position is that it essentially drives a wedge between cognitive processes and action, given the demand placed on a would-be responsible knower of a thorough examination of all the evidence. Since thinking routinely proceeds by shortcuts, and is commonly successful, it would be good that our epistemology adjust accordingly (on the connection between Newman and the recent work in fast and frugal heuristics, see Aquino 2004: 129–34).

There are some developments of a formal and structural kind from the *University Sermons* to the *Grammar*. On the philosophical, there is a quantum leap in conceptual precision. Newman essentially front-loads this in the first four chapters of the *Grammar*, which present the individual items of his conceptual toolbox. This development rings terminological changes on analogous concepts in the *University Sermons*. Apprehension is now an important *terminus technicus* as is assent (judgement). In addition, there is not only a distinction between assent and inference, but there are different kinds of assent (real and notional), and different kinds of inference (informal as well as formal). Presumption is also further differentiated into seven kinds. The attention to definition and minute discriminations speak to a quite different kind of text than the *University Sermons*; one that is not only more intellectually penetrating, but that is also far more systematic. Relatedly, on the structural front in the *Grammar*, Newman carefully separates out religious from non-religious epistemological material. Chapters 1–4 and 6–9 respectively provide an outline of a general epistemology, with Chapters 5 and 10 covering religious matters, which respectively illustrate the application of apprehension and assent and of non-formal inference and certitude to the religious field.

The clear demarcation between non-religious and religious material in the *Grammar* yields two positive results: first, making the case for the intelligibility and reasonableness of religious belief supposes making the case for the intelligibility and reasonableness of belief formation in general; and second, there is the avoidance of the kind of circularity that appeared in the *University Sermons*, where Newman occasionally appeals to the Bible and theological notions such as grace to indemnify an account of faith as a form of knowing. While there is significant continuity when it comes to the targeted epistemological models, especially as these models get further specified in the domain of religious belief, there is also some development.

Whately is more of a polemical target in the *Grammar* than in the *University Sermons*. In the first four chapters of the *Grammar*, for example, Whately's *Elements of Logic* seems to be the text that Newman has most proximally in mind. This comes through most generally in Newman's discussion of the limits of formal logic, which, for Whately, is the form of reason reducible to syllogism (or enthymeme), playing the role of universally valid reason. Perhaps, however, the clearest place where Newman turns the tables on his former mentor is in his use of the term 'grammar' to name the informal and personal form of knowing, which has the sanction of the natural. In *The Elements of Logic* 'grammar' describes laying out in all detail the various steps of logical inference, which are universal. The implication is that 'grammar' univocally applies to the domain of logical or formal inference, and so the true horizon of reason entails the validation of formal argument, which is content independent. Newman, however, deliberately uses the term 'grammar' in the area of substantive judgements, which are domain specific and which directly refer to states of affairs. Yet Newman not only turns the *Elements of Logic* against Whately, he does the same with Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric*. In the latter text, Whately distinguishes between logic and rhetoric; the former belongs to the logic of validation, the latter to the logic of inquiry. Appealing to Aristotle, Whately cannot resist an ordering. He suggests that rhetoric is an offshoot of logic (Whately 1851: 4), largely on grounds of its informal nature and its irreducibility to syllogism. And proving again that he is the source of Newman's vocabulary and meaning, if not necessarily of his epistemological priorities, Whately underscores that presumption is the ground of rhetoric as persuasive speech (112–32) and even goes on to say that the great mark of presumption—which he admits has real practical value (even or especially in religion)—is uninquiring assent (132). Newman can be understood to take advantage of Whately's keen distinction between logic and rhetoric as well as his asides about presumption to generate precisely the opposite order of priorities. Presumption is the common ground of human knowing; consequently it is reasonable to rely on it in general and in religious matters in particular. Newman essentially inverts the order of priority Whately gives to logic and rhetoric in general, and the logic of validation and the logic of inquiry, favouring the latter in both cases.

The *Grammar* not only develops and sharpens the naturalist epistemology of the *University Sermons*; it also adds to it, first by minting a new concept, that is, the 'illative sense', and second by its concentrated focus on the concept of certitude. The novelty of the 'illative sense' does not lie entirely or even for the most part in that it is a terminological invention that stresses the personal pronoun in knowledge (see Ferreira 1986 and Aquino 2004). The knower (and the believer) in the *University Sermons* is situated, active, and has a point of view. In the *Grammar*, while all of this is carried forward, the personal nature of knowledge is underscored to such an extent that it has been a major subject of commentary and criticism. Aristotle's *phronesis*, however, is now not only more explicitly invoked (Ch. 8), informal reasoning (i) is granted much greater scope than was the case in Aristotle who allowed practical wisdom to exist side by side with logical, metaphysical, scientific, and even rhetorical reasoning; and (ii) plays a more explicit critical role vis-à-vis the rationalist mode of reasoning dominated by logical or formal inference. Due in part at least to the sceptical challenge of the likes of Froude, and perhaps also resonant with contemporary Catholic responses on the Continent to the rise of materialism and relativism, the *Grammar* also evinces a much greater focus on certitude, distinguishing it from assent by thinking of it as reflecting on assent's entitlements. Newman's discussion of certitude in Chapter 8 of the *Grammar* is highly sophisticated, but it has proved to be one of the most disputed points of his entire religious epistemology, and has been questioned by many who champion his naturalist religious epistemology, and found unnecessary by other epistemologists who belong to the naturalist tradition.

## Influence, Elective Affinities, and Problems

In terms of reception one can distinguish between provable influence and the perception by commentators and critics of Newman of elective affinities between his epistemology and that of some major modern thinkers who are similarly dissatisfied with the status accorded belief and the demand for procedures of validation. With regard to elective affinity I make the further distinction between major modern thinkers who have actually read Newman and those who have not. With regard to problems, I consider only two: (i) the problem of relativism that Newman's illative sense raises—or, otherwise put, the problem of the common measure; and (ii) that of certitude regarding both its relation to assent and its indefectibility.

In speaking of the direct influence of Newman's epistemology in general, and his religious epistemology in particular, on later thinkers, it is useful to distinguish between appropriation within and without Catholic circles. In Catholic circles two elements of Newman's epistemology have had particular traction. These are respectively the notions of conscience and personation that specify the religious knower as dynamic, situated, unsubstitutable, and involved in his or her assent or judgement. Newman's view of conscience underscored its direct contact with God who speaks in and to the situations in which judgement is required. His rather Protestant-sounding rendition of conscience was read in Catholic circles almost always with the echo of other asseverations on conscience sounded in more popular venues where the issue usually was the relative prerogatives of the individual and the community. Newman being a controversialist, depending on the point to be made or qualified, there were different stresses. In his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, Newman is anxious to underscore the point that being a Catholic does not involve a sacrifice of intellect as Catholicism's despisers assert; accordingly he emphasizes the rights of conscience over obedience to the Pope. In contrast, in the *Apologia*, while continuing to think of conscience as ineluctable, as a practical matter, he thinks, it should be prepared to yield to the authority of the church. These different emphases have led to quite different readings of Newman. Some of the early twentieth-century Catholic modernists such as Georg Tyrrell (1861–1909) and Friedrich von Hügel (1852–1925) availed of Newman's notion of conscience to provide critical leverage over a church deemed to be dogmatic, juridical, and authoritarian. Almost a hundred years later, however, Pope emeritus Benedict XVI found Newman's view of conscience to be thoroughly non-individualist and to constitute nothing less than a vital defence of an authentic humanism.

Newman's emphasis upon the irreducible personal nature of all judgement has had broad humanist appeal in Catholic circles. It has also found support within mainstream twentieth-century Catholic thought. If in both philosophy and theology readings of Aquinas dominated epistemology and the understanding of the relationship between faith and reason, there was also a felt need for refreshing and recalibration. The history of twentieth-century Catholic thought displays complex interactions with Kant, German Idealism, and Heidegger. But Newman also played a significant role. Erich Przywara was the first major German lionizer of Newman's thought, and also his first translator into German. In terms of religious epistemology, he was especially interested in Newman's account of the knower as dynamically oriented to reality in judgement, and in turn the religious knower as dynamically oriented to God as the ground of all reality. For Przywara, Newman helped revivify as well as clarify the classical Augustinian–Thomistic view of religious knowledge which was in danger of being rendered otiose in neo-Scholastic versions which made proof determinative and the knower a machine of inference, thereby ironically replicating the rationalism it would resist. Without question, however, it was the Canadian theologian, Bernard Lonergan, who most deeply and comprehensively engaged Newman's epistemology. Not only does Lonergan explicitly express his debt to Newman's *Grammar* in the construction of his epistemological masterpiece *Insight*, which outlines the various forms of knowing from experience, through understanding, to judgement, but it is obvious that he puts in operation Newman's crucial distinction between ratiocination and judgement when he points to insight as exemplary of human knowing. It is so because it is personal, self-involving, implicit rather than explicit, and directly connects—as judgement in Newman does—with reality. Although Lonergan articulates a general epistemology, which directly attends to the self-understanding of the various disciplines of inquiry, it is undoubtedly the case that *Insight* is in the service of a theological project whose central aim is to make sense of the theological disciplines while showing the form of religious knowing that both binds them together and provides their raison d'être (see Lonergan 1957, 1972).

Much more could be said about twentieth- and twenty-first-century Catholic appropriation of Newman's epistemology. For the sake of balance, it should be noted that there have been other, non-self-consciously Catholic appropriations of Newman's epistemology and, derivatively, his religious epistemology. Walter Jost's groundbreaking work, *Rhetorical Thought in John Henry Newman*, can be understood not only to be a thoroughly convincing archaeology of the effect of the rhetorical tradition on Newman's discourse and epistemic commitments, but also as offering a constructive proposal about knowing using Newman as the exemplar. The proposal questions the authority of the modern rationalist model of knowledge and verification and suggests that the tradition of rhetoric articulates a more adequate epistemology in which shared assumption, habit, and non-logical persuasive force prove key. As indicated above, Newman himself set the terms for the opposition between rhetoric and logic in the *Grammar*, when he inverted Whately's priorities. The genius of Jost's book is to have developed as well as explicated Newman on this point. In addition, Jost exposes a Newman whose thought shows strong affinities with the twentieth-century hermeneutic thought and also the Aristotle of the *Nichomachean Ethics*. In suggesting the latter, Jost underscores the tendency in Newman's thought to connect assent and especially the illative sense to Aristotle's notion of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Finally, although more elsewhere than in his magisterial study on Newman and rhetoric, Jost considers the application of rhetorical epistemology to the religious domain. Here Newman proves to be an indispensable guide.

Jost's connection between the rhetoric tradition and twentieth-century hermeneutics serves as a segue to three forms of elective affinity with Newman's epistemology. A number of Newman commentators have drawn attention to the affinity between Newman's epistemology and the hermeneutic theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer (Carr 1996). Although Gadamer's classical text, *Truth and Method* (1965), draws mainly on the resources of continental philosophy to articulate a view of knowing in which presupposition and tradition have purchase over logic and argument, its resonance with Newman's thought is welcomed as a possible point of convergence between both analytic and continental philosophical traditions in the fight against the common enemy of foundationalism, whether it be of the Cartesian or empiricist kind. The rehabilitation of prejudice against Enlightenment diktats regarding the necessity to justify belief is common to both, even if the Enlightenment targets may vary: the French philosophes and Kant in the case of Gadamer; Locke and his epigones in the case of Newman. In their common articulation of the prerogatives of prejudice and the priority of judgement, both appeal to Aristotle's notion of practical wisdom and set it forth as an inspiration and analogue of a proper understanding of how the mind works in fact. Besides the obvious terminological differences and differences in philosophical ancestry, there are two differences worth noting. First, while Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, in line with Heidegger's views on understanding and language, is intended to be descriptive of a general human behaviour, in fact it tends to have a prescriptive cast and a somewhat exceptionalist air. Second, in *Truth and Method* we find no application to reception of the religious tradition. That such a hermeneutical theory can be so applied is evidenced by the work of Paul Ricoeur, who, with requisite caveats, applies a general hermeneutic to the field of religion in general and Christian faith in particular.

An affinity on the level of general epistemology that has drawn even more attention is that between Wittgenstein and Newman. This is due in equal parts to the startling overlap in terms of basic position, the fact that the *Grammar* provided stimulation for Wittgenstein's reflections on belief in *On Certainty* (*OC*) (on the affinity between Newman and Wittgenstein, see Ferreira 1986, Barrett 1997, and Kerr 2000). Like the *Grammar*, Wittgenstein's fragmentary late text has as an essential part of its agenda the chastising of the philosophical urge to submit all belief—non-religious and religious—to a procedure of justification. Wittgenstein does not have the same exemplars in mind as Newman—for him Russell and Moore function routinely as stand-ins—but he finds implausible the universalist claims made on behalf of models of formal-logical reasoning. Knowing, in his view, is domain specific and domain appropriate. Relatedly, just as the *Grammar* provided a negative response to William Froude's claim of the intellectual and moral seriousness of doubt, Wittgenstein finds that the appeal to doubt in philosophy is largely frivolous (*OC*, 22 c in Anscombe and von Wright 1969). Similar to Newman, Wittgenstein can be described as a naturalist when it comes to epistemology. In *On Certainty*, his sole task is to exhibit how reason actually works. Illuminating questions can be asked, he is convinced, only in situations in which much has already been taken for granted (*OC*, 25e in in Anscombe and von Wright 1969). Thinking, then, can only operate on the bases of belief or supposition. In one of Wittgenstein's colourful phrases: 'If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put' (*OC*, 43e–44e in Anscombe and von Wright 1969). Similar to Newman—but perhaps with considerably greater emphasis—beliefs are not atoms; they are related to other beliefs. While some may be more important than others, each depends on the support of the others. Newman definitely tends to speak at points through the *Grammar* as if there are some beliefs which function in the manner of first principles—this is a legacy from Reid. Crucially, however, on other occasions, most notably in his recourse to the cable or rope metaphor regarding the interlocking of beliefs or propositions, he anticipates Wittgenstein. A final overlap: Wittgenstein remains in broad concert with the *Grammar* in indicating the generally non-anomalous character of religious belief vis-à-vis other kinds of belief. This is not to deny, of course, that religious belief has some unique features because of the object of the belief and the kind of commitment involved. But from Wittgenstein's point of view, the crucial point is that, precisely as belief, religious belief should not be thought to have special vulnerabilities. Any numbers of thinkers have drawn attention to Wittgenstein's religious sympathies and proceeded to develop a fuller and more coherent religious epistemology.

Another affinity can be seen in the connection between Newman's thought and the analytic tradition of epistemology. Along these lines, some have sought to form constructive links with Newman on issues such as an informal cumulative case for theism (Mitchell 1973, 1990; Abraham 1987), the role of properly formed dispositions and antecedent assumptions in evaluating the force of evidence (Mitchell 1973, 1994; Wainwright 1995; Wynn 2005a, 2005b), an account of informed judgement in conversation with social and virtue epistemologies (Aquino 2004), and an epistemology of divine revelation through the notion of threshold (Abraham 2006). Some have offered critical and appreciative evaluations of Newman's approach to epistemological issues in the *Grammar* (see Price 1969). Perhaps, the expansive territory of contemporary epistemology (and the broadening of epistemic desiderata) has made it possible to put Newman's thought in conversation with the analytic tradition of epistemology.

A brief comment on the affinity between Newman's epistemology and Alasdair MacIntyre's view of human knowing is also in order. Although we must avoid suggesting genetic dependence, MacIntyre not only has read Newman, but has on occasions pressed him explicitly into argument (see MacIntyre 2009). In the case of such texts as *After Virtue* (1984) and *Rationally Dependent Animals* (1999) one is speaking of a broad overlap regarding the picture of human knowing as practical rather than theoretical, and also the shared conviction that the single most flagrant error in modern epistemology is the exaggerated respect afforded to theoretical reason. No less than Newman is MacIntyre inclined to trust either formal logic or automatic appeal to supposedly independent rules of justification. There are also a number of noticeable differences. First, surprisingly for a self-professed 'Catholic' thinker, MacIntyre does not explicitly make the move from a general to a religious epistemology. In this respect, he importantly differs not only from Newman, but also from Aquinas who is, arguably, the hinge figure in his most important work. Second, MacIntyre's epistemology is more communitarian than Newman's in the *Grammar*—at least to the degree to which one privileges Newman's account of the illative sense in the *Grammar* (offset by Ch. 10). Third, MacIntyre emphasizes the social–communitarian nature of knowledge and underscores the intentional nature of reproducing knowledge, practices, and forms of life. Interestingly, he does not privilege the church. If he privileges any intentional community, it is the university. For Newman, of course, the religious community is the community of communities. Notice of this seems to be given in Chapter 10 of the *Grammar*, wherein it seems Newman moves from the individual subject of knowledge to the communal–social object.

The contrast between Newman and MacIntyre here throws into relief one of the most obvious problems about Newman's treatment of the illative sense, that is, the relativistic implications of what appears to be a thoroughly individualistic account of the human being who assents or judges. The question at hand is whether Newman's appeal to the illative sense, as a personal criterion, resolves (or complicates) the problem of securing a common measure (an independent standard of justification) by which radically different communities can adjudicate their claims. It will not do to say that, given what we know about Newman's polemic against private judgement, this cannot be his intention. This is undoubtedly true, and it is open to a defender of Newman to recall Newman's discussion of 'wisdom' in the *University Sermons*, which attempts to norm how the judger operates, and to suggest that the analogy between the capacity for judgement illustrated by the person defined by the illative sense and Aristotle's examples of practical wisdom points implicitly to an exemplarity that is worthy of imitation and is also likely to be the fruit of such imitation. The defender could also make appeal to the last chapter of a *Grammar* in which it seems the individual subject of judgement operates more out of a community consensus. But the fact is that Newman does not make any of these connections explicit. Newman's discussion of the social and progressive nature of the illative sense needs further attention. Thus, what Frederick Aquino calls the problem of the common measure is a real problem, which calls at least for supplementation in a fully explicit social epistemology that focuses on exemplarity and the transmission of a tradition of discourses and practices. In trying to show that the average person is justified in assenting to propositions without full understanding and without demonstrative proof, Newman overstates the personal nature of the illative sense. The illative sense has a personal dimension, but its proper development requires good epistemic practices in which people refine cognitive skills under the tutelage of exemplars of informed judgement (see Aquino 2004: esp. Ch. 4).

The other major problem in Newman's articulation of a general and religious epistemology concerns certainty. Arguably, it is the problem of certitude that provides the immediate provocation for the *Grammar*. In his explicit discussion of the reflexive nature of certitude (Ch. 7), Newman comes dangerously close to playing the game of justification that has been the aim of his text to dispute: certitude gets defined as justified conviction. Such a definition seems to conflate the phenomenological and epistemological conditions of belief formation. Commentators and critics of Newman alike have worried about the necessity of this move. Some of the more interesting interrogations have involved comparisons between Newman and Wittgenstein on this point. If both are naturalists, Wittgenstein is in the end much more consistent. For him, all procedures of justification are circular, and depend upon first principles as these operate to organize a field of intelligibility.

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## CHAPTER 35

# KARL BARTH

PAUL T. NIMMO

## Introduction

Throughout the work of Karl Barth, there is a steady and resolute confidence that the Trinitarian God is known—and thus also knowable—in the church. Indeed both the existence and the proclamation of the church of Jesus Christ are entirely dependent upon God being known in the church, and being present to those within it. In corresponding fashion, then, the task of the epistemology of theology is never a matter of abstract speculation concerning a possible knowledge of God, but always a matter of faithful attention to and investigation of the actual revelation of God.

This confidence in the knowledge of God and this circumscription of the task of epistemology are neither, in the case of Barth, the result of a naïve and exuberant piety, nor the product of an uncritical and unreflective mind. By contrast, challenging questions of epistemology arose throughout Barth's career in the course of his theological reflections, and had deep ramifications both for his constructive systematics project and for his ongoing political activities. His stance—encompassing a firm confidence in the revealed knowledge of God and a strident rejection of the ways of natural theology—led him to occupy a highly particular and rather isolated position within the field of theology.

In this chapter, I begin in the first section by exploring the contours of Barth's epistemology of theology, with reference to the role of Word and Spirit, the primary and secondary objectivity of God, and the place of analogy. In the second section, I attend to the ways in which this conception of the ground of theology impacts upon Barth's engagement of other disciplines in his theological work. And in conclusion, I consider briefly three ways in which it may be important for the epistemology of theology to continue to take the work of Barth forward in contemporary endeavour.

# THE CONTOURS OF BARTH'S EPISTEMOLOGY OF THEOLOGY

Barth's mature presentation of the epistemology of theology is found in the opening sections of volume II/1 of the *Church Dogmatics* (*Kirchliche Dogmatik* (*KD*)) (all translations are my own, but references include the English translation, Barth: 1956–75). The starting point for his reflections is the profound conviction that God is known in the church: 'God gives Godself to the human being to be known in the revelation of God's Word through the Holy Spirit' (*KD* II/1, 8 [9]). From this position, questions concerning the *possibility* of knowledge of God are secondary, for the *actuality* of such knowledge has already rendered them redundant. And similarly, questions concerning the *possible* object or mode of knowledge of God are no longer central, for the *actual* content of such knowledge, and way it is given, has already rendered them rather superfluous. Indeed, there is no prospect of knowledge of God divorced from this Trinitarian event of revelation. Barth declares: 'the revelation attested in Holy Scripture is the revelation of God, who as such, i.e. as the Lord, is the Father from whom it comes, the Son, who fulfils it objectively (for us) and the Holy Spirit, who fulfils it subjectively (in us)' (*KD* I/2, 1 [3]). Yet at the same time, Barth deems questions concerning the extent of the knowledge and the knowability of God to be 'legitimate and meaningful … [as] questions of church proclamation and therefore also of dogmatics—objects of its formal and material task' (*KD* II/1, 3 [5]). There remains, then, significant work to do in the epistemology of theology, subject to the guiding principle that the way in which this work proceeds is appropriate to the unique identity of the subject matter—God—under investigation.

Intrinsic to Barth's conception of the epistemology of theology is the reciprocity between true knowledge of God and the divine act of revelation. True knowledge of God is primarily and essentially God's knowledge of Godself—the *immediate* knowledge of God as Object to Godself that is appropriate to the divine life. This manner of objectivity Barth refers to as the 'primary objectivity' of God. This objective and immediate knowledge of God in the immanent life of God is for Barth the starting point of the epistemology of theology. In revelation, however, though the knowledge involved is no less true, the knowledge in question is a *mediated* knowledge of God, given as God renders Godself an Object encountering the human subject. This move into mediated objectivity is a free and gracious divine act of accommodation, and Barth construes it in a Trinitarian way: 'in God's Word, God confronts the human subject as Object; through the Holy Spirit, God makes the human subject accessible to God, capable of beholding and conceiving God as Object' (*KD* II/1, 9 [10]). Barth refers to this manner of objectivity as the 'secondary objectivity' of God. When God reveals Godself and becomes an Object for humanity, God does so in a way which is *indirect*—'not naked, but clothed, under the sign and under the veil of *other* objects distinct from God' (*KD* II/1, 16 [16]). In the event of revelation, God takes up particular creaturely realities and reveals Godself through them, and allows Godself to be known within the limits of creaturely cognition. The one event of revelation thus inseparably entails the objective revelation of God through creaturely media *and* the subjective appropriation of that divine revelation through creaturely faculties, both aspects of the event being effected by God. The creaturely realities remain at all times creaturely realities, and do not in any way become identical with God; but as they are taken up as instruments of the divine work in the event of revelation, they speak for God, witnessing to the objectivity of God and thus making the knowledge of God possible and necessary. There is on the one hand clarity and certainty, but on the other hand hiddenness and mystery, and the latter are ordered to the former. Here is the heart of Barth's teleologically ordered dialectic of the veiling and unveiling of God in revelation, which remains central to his mature theology (McCormack 1997: 459). In brief: God's revelation involves God's concealment, and God's concealment serves God's revelation. Thus although hiddenness remains an essential dimension of the revelation of God, it is never, as in some postmodern trajectories, the final resting point for the divine revelation.

The knowledge of the triune God that results from the divine event of Self-revelation is not knowledge like any other, any more than God is one more object in a series of other objects. In revelation, God does not give Godself to be known in the same way as other objects, not even other objects that awaken an affective as well as a cognitive response. By contrast, God gives Godself to be known in God's absolutely unique objectivity, requiring the human being to turn to God, to open to God, and to surrender to God. There is no place for a neutral or uninvolved response to this encounter. To speak of the knowledge of God is therefore to speak of the knowledge of faith. Faith represents the way in which the human being corresponds to the divine revelation, and embraces not only knowledge of God, but also the dispositions of love, trust, hope, and obedience—dispositions not separate from faith, but constituent determinations of it. This faith and knowledge is entirely dependent noetically and ontically upon the preceding divine act of Self-revelation; thus Barth describes the situation of the believing and knowing human being as having a 'position of subsequence [*des Nachher*]' (*KD* II/1, 22 [21]). In other words, the human being cannot seek control or disposal over God or God's revelation but can only ask and pray over and again for revelation and knowledge of God.

So what is the *content* of true knowledge of God? For Barth, the knowledge that is at stake in the revelation of God by Word and Spirit is the knowledge that God is the *Lord*, Lord of all creation and Lord of the covenant. The inner truth of this revelation—that which renders this revelation of God in time final and unsurpassable—is, Barth writes, 'that [God] from eternity to eternity is the *Triune* One—God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' (*KD* II/1, 51 [47]). The ontic and noetic ground of this revelation of God in time—of the secondary objectivity of God—is the human existence of Jesus Christ. The human flesh assumed by the eternal Word is thus 'the first sacrament, the foundation of everything which God establishes and uses in revelation as a secondary objectivity, whether before or after the appearance of Jesus Christ' (*KD* II/1, 58 [54]).

Barth is adamant that 'we have no analogy on the basis of which the essence and being of God as the Lord could become accessible to us' (*KD* II/1, 82 [75])—or for that matter God's essence and being as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer. This knowledge of God and its human reception can only be a matter of the free and gracious Self-revelation of God. Accordingly, Barth self-consciously opposes the position of Roman Catholic theology in respect of its construal of the knowability of God in general and of certain understandings of the *analogia entis* (analogy of being) in particular. It is not that Barth has no place for analogy in his epistemology of theology; it is that he refuses to accept that such an analogy is already given or attainable in the sphere of creation independently of the event of divine revelation. By contrast, the knowability of God rests 'only in an analogy that is to be created by God's grace, the analogy of grace and of faith' (*KD* II/1, 92 [85]). This analogy is not the property or achievement of created being, then, but results from the gracious and dynamic revelatory intervention of God into creation itself: it is a mode of the revelation of God and an activity of the divine grace. And as faith comes to know by way of this analogy, so too by way of this analogy the analogy itself comes to be known (Jüngel 1982: 228).

The corollary of Barth's view on the place of analogy in the epistemology of theology is his strident rejection of natural theology. In a lengthy consideration of this understanding of the knowability of God, Barth explores possible reasons for the persistence and popularity of natural theology in the history of the church. He observes that it seeks to address the perennial riddle of human existence, that it seeks to introduce others paedagogically and pastorally to the Christian faith, and that it seeks to be faithful to the understanding of divine knowability portrayed in Scripture. Yet to these reasons Barth counters that—in light of Scripture—the answers of natural theology to existential questions are never reliable or compelling, and that natural theology neither provides a true foundation for Christian mission nor respects the consistent command of Scripture to attend solely to divine revelation and not to seek a further knowability of God. The final reason for the endurance of natural theology that Barth investigates is its endorsement of the openness of humanity for knowledge of God (*KD* II/1, 141 [128]). Yet here again, Barth is not impressed: 'The person who cannot and will not be deprived of the idea that a readiness for God is at her disposal even without the grace of God is precisely the one who is *closed* to the readiness of God [to be known in revelation]' (*KD* II/1, 150 [135], emphasis added). It is perhaps here that Barth's disagreement with Emil Brunner fundamentally lies: the reality according to Barth is that the human person is basically closed to God, indeed, an enemy of God; Brunner's view of an enduring *formal* image of God—the famed 'point of contact' (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) in the human person—thus fatally smuggles in a *material* content abstracted from revelation (McDowell 2006: 29–30). The view that the human person is basically open to God, even if only insofar as it recognizes its limits, can yield no true knowledge of God and merely domesticates the genuine revelation of God. Natural theology of all sorts, with its different understanding of human potential and its false promise of knowledge of God, must be opposed and excised at every turn. The relentless demand of the first thesis of the Barmen Declaration formulated by Barth—'Jesus Christ, as He is attested to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God, whom we have to hear, to trust and to obey in life and in death'—is a resolute reminder of this against the backdrop of a terrible and terrifying perversion of natural theology.

Yet this picture of closedness and enmity is not the last word to be said in respect of the possibility of human knowledge of God. There *is* a true readiness and true openness of humanity for God: it is found in Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ alone. And as humanity by faith and by the power of the Spirit participates in Jesus Christ, so too there exists a genuine readiness and openness for the revelation of God on the part of humanity. Clearly the capacity to know God by faith is one that can only be received from God in the event of revelation, for God cannot be apprehended by our own unaided powers of cognition. But the God who is and remains hidden becomes apprehensible to us in faith, as God acts to take into service our thoughts and concepts and to direct us and them to a true apprehension of God. This, then, is the *analogia fidei* (analogy of faith): there comes to be in this event of grace a correspondence of 'the known with the act of knowing, of the object with the act of thinking, of the Word of God in the word thought and spoken by humanity' (*KD* I/1, 257 [243–4]). By the grace of God, then, and by the virtue of faith, Barth writes, 'we know [God] in *truth*, albeit within the confines of human cognition, and this knowing can and must be a *confident* knowing' (*KD* II/1, 227 [202]). This apprehension may always be limited and approximate, but it remains true and thus not in itself to be doubted or negated.

This knowledge of God not only claims human thoughts and words, but also permits and demands that one should think and speak further about God—despite the fact that, on the basis of our native human capabilities, there is no human capacity to do so. Yet once again, what is impossible for human beings is possible for God: God grants the ability to participate actively in the revelation of God by way of human thought and speech. This act of grace can only render the recipient humble, and indeed participation in the revelation of God in this way can only ever occur in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. Where and when this happens, there arises—by the grace of God—what Barth calls an 'analogy of truth' between human discourse about God and God as the Object of human discourse. This analogy is not static but dynamic, and it does not fall under human control. Instead, it can only come into being through an act of divine grace as—in faith and obedience—the Christian appropriates 'the promise that we will speak the truth in the analogy of *God's* truth *itself*' (*KD* II/1, 261 [231]). The discipline of theology is correspondingly dependent on grace, remaining a pilgrim discipline that is always underway and never reaches the end of its journey.

There are three brief observations that may be made at this point in respect of this account of the epistemology of theology and its reception.

First, by virtue of rooting his understanding of the reality and possibility of knowledge of God in an event of divine Self-revelation, Barth does not easily find classification as either a foundationalist or a non-foundationalist in terms of the epistemology of theology (McCormack 2008: 125). In respect of the former, Barth refuses to allow revelation to be grounded in or verified by anything external to it, and thus eschews any philosophical or anthropological foundation for knowledge of God. In respect of the latter, Barth insists that the revelatory act of God by Word and Spirit is precisely the foundation of all human knowledge of God, transcending the limits and capabilities of the human person.

Second, by virtue of rejecting all forms of natural theology, Barth finds himself espousing what is very much a minority view in theology. On the one hand, his denial that texts such as Romans 1.18–32 offer a clear scriptural affirmation of natural theology leads to the rejection of his epistemology of theology among many in his own, Reformed tradition. On the other hand, his rejection of the *analogia entis*—at least in certain Roman Catholic formulations—led Barth to a series of disagreements with Roman Catholic theologians such as Erich Przywara and Hans Urs von Balthasar, without Barth ever feeling persuaded fundamentally to alter this position (Johnson 2010: 231).

Third, by virtue of his account of the secondary objectivity of God, Barth cannot be charged guilty of limiting the scope of the revelation of God and thus of restricting the sources of knowledge of God. In the divine freedom, God can take up any creaturely medium, even the most unlikely of media, and use it as a vehicle of Self-revelation (*KD* I/1, 55 [55]). In each case, one will have to do with a Trinitarian event, and thus with the power of the Word and the Spirit and the content of the Lordship of God. But that God can reveal Godself outside the walls of the church—outwith Scripture and proclamation, albeit never at odds with their witness to Jesus Christ—is for Barth a given.

## The Consequences of Barth's Epistemology of Theology

Given the essential role that revelation plays in Barth's epistemology of theology, yet also the clear assumption that revelation is possible through any created media, a question arises as to whether and how theology in general, and dogmatics in particular, might engage other disciplines. To explore this requires a consideration of how Barth conceives of theology as a discipline in relation to others, and an analysis of whether conversation between theology and other disciplines is ultimately possible.

First, at the outset of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth defines the theological discipline of dogmatics as 'the scientific self-examination of the Christian church in view of the content of its distinctive [*eigentümlichen*] discourse about God' (*KD* I/1, 1 [3]). As well as locating this critical study squarely within the activity of the church, this definition stresses its particularity in respect of its content. The purpose of dogmatic theology is to ask whether this particular content derives from, conforms with, and leads to Jesus Christ, in whom God reveals Godself to humanity and reconciles Godself with humanity—Jesus Christ is thus the sole criterion of its truth.

Insofar as this discipline works on a definite object of knowledge, follows a definite and consistent path of knowledge, and is in a position to account for this path to itself and everyone capable of working on this object and following this path, it is possible to describe it as a 'science' alongside other 'sciences'. And though such a description is not necessary to the essence or success of theology—for its criterion is only Jesus Christ and not an externally imposed conception of the 'scientific'—Barth insists that theology should nonetheless insist upon being called a 'science'. Such a description might be construed as suggesting a discipline firmly within the control of its human practitioners. However, the very possibility of dogmatics depends upon the possibility that God can be known by humanity, and thus upon the event of grace in which God reveals Godself to humanity in Jesus Christ. Insofar 'as dogmatics receives the standard by which it measures discourse about God in Jesus Christ, in the event of divine action corresponding to the promise given to the church, it becomes possible as knowledge of the truth' (*KD* I/1, 11 [12]). This is the *analogia fidei* at work: by grace, there is a human appropriation of knowledge of God corresponding to the Self-revelation of God. By virtue of its basis in the divine activity of revelation, the human activity of dogmatics is called to speak with confidence and assurance and yet to recognize that it stands in constant need of criticism and revision. As a human activity dependent on grace, it is always an activity undertaken in prayer.

Attention to this material is important because 'the nature of theology's relationship to other disciplines depends upon the question of *theology*'s setting and task' (Oakes 2012: 166, emphasis added). Here, at the outset of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth rejects any possibility of grounding the discipline of theology on material abstracted from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as it is proclaimed in the church. Barth therefore eschews the opportunity of founding or locating theology with reference to material from such disciplines as philosophy, anthropology, or ethics. Any such manoeuvres would risk importing natural theology into the system from the outset, and depart from the core task of theology, namely the critical examination of the proclamation of Jesus Christ. The consequence is that, for Barth, '[t]he only way to develop an account of … knowledge [of God is] from within that knowledge itself' (Abraham 1998: 375).

The dangers of a superficial reading of this material on dogmatics are readily at hand: that one might consider Barth's attention to revelation as evidence of the 'revelatory positivism' with which he was charged by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (see Greggs 2011: 54–64), or that one might view Barth's Trinitarian orientation as endorsing a revelatory exclusivism that abrogates the possibility of constructive conversation with other fields of study from the outset and exposits instead simply a '*circulus veritatis Dei*' (circle of the truth of God) (Roberts 1991: 61). If such dangers were realities, then Barth's conception of the discipline of theology might render it something of a closed sphere of engagement, with little attention possible to cultural context or external critique.

Such reductive conceptions of Barth's theological enterprise run into a first problem immediately in view of his epistemology of theology and its appreciation of the *extent* to which the divine freedom calls creation to serve as a witness to Jesus Christ. The Christian in general and theology in particular is thus charged with a certain attentiveness: to the revelation of the Word of God certainly, but also to the unexpected places where that Word might be revealed. Barth addresses this theme late in the *Church Dogmatics*, where he treats of the presence of 'words in creation' and the 'little lights of creation'. In respect of the former, those words in creation which are not identical to the Word, but may be or become true words, Barth affirms explicitly the possibility of revelation outwith the walls of the church, writing that 'in the world reconciled by God in Jesus Christ there is no secular sphere (*Profanität*) left by God to its own devices or withdrawn from God's domain' (*KD* IV/3, 133 [119]). This is no natural theology, however, because it is still Jesus Christ who is in view, as creaturely media are employed for His Self-attestation. In respect of the latter, those features of the creaturely world which relate to its role as the external basis of the covenant, Barth posits firmly that 'the self-manifestation of God in Jesus Christ does not occur in an empty, formless, and dark sphere, but one which has its real existence (*Dasein*), its fullness, form and brightness' (*KD* IV/3, 172 [151]). The little lights are thus not strictly matters of faith or of reconciliation, but simply attest the fact that the world is created by God to be the theatre of reconciliation. Neither the 'words in creation' nor the 'little lights of creation', therefore, contradict the epistemology of theology exposited above (DeCou 2013: 155).

A further problem with the assumption that Barth closes down avenues of conversation by means of his revelatory positivism or Trinitarian exclusivism is that it rests on the false assumption that coming to a particular conversation with a series of existing commitments in itself precludes fruitful or faithful conversation. By contrast, it is precisely the experience of the theologian that such existing commitments may require revision and correction in light of further knowledge and greater understanding. For Barth, this is as true when theology converses 'within' the church—with Scripture, and with tradition in the form of ecumenical creeds, denominational confessions, and past dogmatic endeavours—as it is when theology converses 'outwith' the church—with other and varied disciplines—given his radical understanding of revelation outwith the bounds of the church. Theology remains a fallible discipline seeking to follow after the divine grace, and its work remains permanently open to amendment, reformulation, and rejection. Though the criterion of its discourse is fixed, then, that criterion is the person of Jesus Christ, whom the discipline does not have at its disposal. In its response to the revelation of God, dogmatics is 'a toilsome stepping from one partial human insight to another, with the *intention*—but never the *guarantee*—of progress' (*KD* I/1, 13 [14]). Theology is thus in no position to avoid conversation with other disciplines.

A final problem with the assumption that Barth posits theology as a discipline closed to constructive conversation with others, however, is that it fails to observe the ways in which Barth's work in the *Church Dogmatics* proceeds in regular, and at times sustained, conversation with the fruits of the work of other disciplines. This engagement, though carried out on occasion with impatience or intemperacy, reflects the seriousness and urgency which Barth perceives to attend the need for theology to exist in encounter with other perspectives and discourses. For the purposes of demonstrating this practice, two particular conversations will be noted, in both of which Barth offers methodological reflection as well as material engagement.

The first conversation is that between theological ethics and general ethics, which Barth treats in *Church Dogmatics* II/2. For Barth, the question of ethics—the question of the good—is not posed in a vacuum, but in the context of the covenant of grace in which God reveals Godself to humanity in Jesus Christ. And the question of ethics is answered in and by Jesus Christ, as the command of God is by grace given to this human being and by grace fulfilled by this human being. But by dint of this view, Barth writes that, 'remarkably, [the] general conception of *ethics* coincides precisely with the concept of *sin*' (*KD* II/2, 574 [518]). Here there is an echo of Barth's rejection of natural theology as sinful, and on precisely the same grounds: that general ethics tries to find its way to an answer to a theological question—that has already been answered in Jesus Christ—without reference to Jesus Christ.

Barth proceeds to explore three different positive conceptions of the relationship between non-theological ethics and theological ethics: the (liberal Protestant) attempt to ground the latter apologetically in the former, the (philosophical) attempt to define and preserve separate spheres for the former and the latter, and the (Roman Catholic) attempt to see the former and the latter as mutually coordinated. He briskly rejects all three as live options for theological ethics. Yet at the same time, there remains scope here for genuine conversation. In respect of the first option, Barth affirms that if the theological ethicist truly believes that the general ethicist also stands under the Word and command of God, then 'theological ethics can and must allow there to take place an ongoing relationship of its thought and discourse to the human ethical problem in general' (*KD* II/2, 581 [524]). It is part of its faithfulness to its calling to do this, just as it must similarly remain open—without giving up its own principles—to the lessons that can be learned from general ethics. In respect of the second option, Barth's rejection is tempered by the contention that the attitude of theological ethics to every other ethics must be not negative but comprehensive, on the basis that 'all ethical truth is enclosed in the command of the grace of God—regardless of whether the ethical truth to be understood thereby is the rational or the historical, the secular or the religious, the ecclesial or the social in general' (*KD* II/2, 584–5 [527]). And finally, in respect of the third option, Barth holds open the possibility of a legitimate ethics alongside theological ethics called 'Christian ethics', which 'would throw open the whole problem of the way in which human existence and activity is questioned, questionable, and also worthy of questioning' (*KD* II/2, 601 [541]). Such an ethics would have the same starting point, basis, and aim as theological ethics, and the same relationship to knowledge of the Word of God, but it would operate in a way distinct from theological ethics. Barth is light on further explanation here, but the trajectory towards wider engagement remains clear. And when Barth turns to unfold his special ethics in *Church Dogmatics* III/4, this express openness to conversation and the insights of others is attested by the breadth and depth of conversations pursued. At the same time, it is not for nothing that Barth's favourite metaphor for the way theological ethics should approach general ethics is 'annexation', such that a theology of revelation is continually superior over the natural theologies encountered. Barth's engagement in practice, then, is a mixed, ad hoc strategy of inclusion and opposition (Oakes 2012: 198).

The second conversation is that between theological anthropology and general anthropology, which Barth treats in *Church Dogmatics* III/3. Again, the question at stake—here, of anthropology—is not posed in a vacuum, but in the context of the covenant of God with humanity and the fall of humanity from God. The former ensures that, despite the latter, the true nature of humanity is preserved by God, being revealed to humanity in the person of Jesus: this knowledge is simply not available elsewhere. At the same time, however, Barth is well aware that there are other sources of knowledge yielding other conceptions of human being. On the one hand, he notes the possibility that 'we may indeed not be able to accept that to which these other conceptions point as the true being of the real human being'. On the other hand, he asserts that 'we may be able to—and thus also have to—perceive *phenomena* of the human additionally in that to which we are pointed by these other conceptions' (*KD* III/2, 86 [74–5]). And for the adjudication of such phenomena, Barth's Christological criteria stand ready for deployment.

Barth begins by reaffirming that no human self-knowledge can lead to the true knowledge of humanity. And he proceeds to investigate three different views of humanity on the basis of general anthropology—the naturalistic, the ethical, and the existential. At each turn, Barth engages with different views—from Rudolf Otto and Adolf Portmann, through Johann Fichte, to Karl Jaspers—and at each turn Barth laments that one is left not with the true reality of human being, but merely with a description of the phenomena of human being. Not even the exploration of the potentiality and actuality of humanity—and here Barth engages Emil Brunner once again—yields knowledge of true human being. Yet at the same time, Barth insists that he has at no time fundamentally rejected the insights gained from these views: 'We have above all said not "No" but "Yes" to the whole way of human self-discovery as such, to the whole attempt at a more and more deeply penetrating analysis of the picture in which the human being is visible and conceivable to itself' (*KD* III/2, 144 [121–2]). While these phenomena are unable to provide information about the real human being as such, they may nonetheless, on their own ground, have truth and significance and present symptoms of true human being. And more than this, Barth claims, under the presupposition of knowledge of true human being, 'one can come to a non-theological but real knowledge of human from the[se] forms that is recognisable to every human eye and every human reason' (*KD* III/2, 237 [199]). Barth proceeds to reprise each of the four views explored previously, this time indicating how each one demonstrates that there is a knowledge of humanity which is 'non-theological but real' and which is 'from the perspective of theological anthropology possible, fundamentally legitimate, and fundamentally necessary' (*KD* III/2, 241 [202]). Once again, then, there is adoption and adaption—as well as repudiation—in Barth's discerning approach to a conversation with other perspectives.

These two conversations are picked from many that might have endorsed Barth's profoundly conversational approach to the exposition of his dogmatic work. The purpose of these conversations is neither simple appropriation nor simple criticism. It is perhaps best conceived as a strategy of critical appropriation, whereby material that is consonant with the theological knowledge gained from revelation can be lauded and assimilated and that which is dissonant can be opposed and rejected. There is evident here a willingness on Barth's part to gain theological knowledge from sources outside the walls of the church, and thus a respect for those sources in their offering of sometimes similar and sometimes different positions. Barth therefore conceives of the locus and sources of theology in a rather more expansive fashion than may be commonly assumed. But there is also a cautiousness that such learning must conform to the revelation of God, and little sense that theological knowledge necessarily either desires or requires such external confirmation. For Barth, then, the norm of theology remains thoroughly and exclusively Christocentric. In the execution of precisely this strategy, Barth's theology is both engaged deeply with the discourse of human thinking in general and tested thoroughly in its premises and conclusions by that same discourse. The result is a methodology that not only effects the need for the discipline of theology in all humility to attend to human knowledge and its potential revelatory import across a range of disciplines, but also assists the achievement of an impressive degree of clarity in the presentation of Barth's position, allowing the reader a very precise sense of where his theological trajectory proceeds relative to alternative paths.

## Conclusion

In closing, I venture to sketch three directions in which it may be important and fruitful to think with and after Barth in matters of the epistemology of theology.

The first pertains to Barth's rejection of natural theology. In many contexts, this theological position has become synonymous with the term 'Barthian', generally invoked as a pejorative term. Yet this position continues to offer a stark challenge to theology to ensure that its focus remain firmly on the revelation of God by Word and Spirit. And more than that, it continues to call into question not only the conventional exegesis of Scripture, which, in Barth's view, posits a second, independent way to knowledge of God independent of the kerygma, but also the very possibility and real effectuality of the enterprise of theological apologetics, which, for Barth, can only be an extempore activity and not a general programme. Precisely the radicality of Barth's position at these points should serve as an ongoing cautionary warning to those who wish to continue on other paths of the epistemology of theology.

The second pertains to Barth's essays concerning interdisciplinary conversation. Even as he rejected natural theology, Barth's pervasive concern and practice was to engage other views, both within and outwith the church. In doing so, Barth both relativized the distinction between church and world as possible loci for the revelatory activity of God and endorsed the theological desirability, even necessity, of serious conversation with studies in other domains. A number of recent works have sought to draw Barth's own theology into precisely this kind of constructive encounter with other fields of research in generative ways—among (many) others Price in respect of theological anthropology (2002), Haddorff in respect of contemporary issues (2010), and La Montagne in respect of critical rationality (2012). Yet here too there is more work to be done, more possibility to be explored.

The third pertains to Barth's conception of the discipline of dogmatics. In particular, there arises a question at this juncture about the contested issue of the place of theological knowledge and theological study in the academy. There is something of an irony here: Barth is adamant throughout the *Church Dogmatics* that the correct locus of dogmatics is the church; yet his own work as a dogmatic theologian between 1921 and his death was carried out in the academy, albeit in a context responsible for ministerial training. And nowhere in the *Church Dogmatics* does Barth offer any sustained reflection on theology as a discipline undertaken within an institution of higher education. Here, then, lies one particularly important area in which it may be significant and generative to think with Barth, but also after him, in respect of the interrelationship of the 'sciences' among which theology has its place.

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## CHAPTER 36

# HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

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Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) is widely regarded as one of the greatest Catholic theologians of the twentieth century; some would go even further in their praise, holding him to be one of the greatest Catholic theologians of all time. However one assesses such claims, it is undeniable that Balthasar's influence on twentieth- and twenty-first-century theology, post-Vatican II Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Anglicans, has been pervasive and far-reaching. Balthasar is most well known for his seven-volume work *The Glory of the Lord*. While the assimilation of Balthasar's work by Anglophone theologians has been steadily gathering pace since the 1970s, due partly to the extraordinary scope and volume of his corpus (see Capol 1990 for a comprehensive bibliography), later theologians have, by and large, drawn selectively from his writings rather than taking them on board as a whole. More recently, however, a number of high-quality short introductions to Balthasar have made his work more accessible than ever (e.g. Howsare 2009 and Kilby 2012). Consequently, his influence on twenty-first-century theology looks set to increase over the coming decades.

In this chapter I select from Balthasar's corpus a limited range of themes for discussion, focusing especially on those themes that are salient to his theological epistemology. The contours of Balthasar's epistemology can be exposed to view by attending to two themes that recur throughout his writings, which appeared over a career spanning more than four decades. The two broad themes that I judge to be at the core of Balthasar's approach to epistemological questions are: Christian experience and its relation to the 'form of Christ', and the connection between holiness and theology. Examining these themes will throw light onto the epistemic considerations that lie at the heart of Balthasar's theology.

To prevent a possible misunderstanding, I first address one immediate potential objection to the project of this chapter. One might well ask, 'Does Balthasar have an epistemology?' Anyone familiar with the recent epistemological debates within analytic theology or philosophy of religion might be forgiven for assuming that he does not. Indeed, those working within these areas today rarely, if ever, mention his name. Moreover, this situation is understandable given that Balthasar's writings have little similarity in style or content to the writings now typical of analytic theology or philosophy of religion.

In response to this potential objection, it suffices to point out that Balthasar was not writing or thinking within the analytic theological or philosophical tradition. Moreover, he self-consciously adopted a critical stance towards the philosophical trends that dominated the Enlightenment and modernity; those very trends that gave rise to modern analytic philosophy at the close of the nineteenth century. However, the fact that Balthasar does not address exactly the same epistemological questions that would concern someone within the analytic tradition does not entail that he was uninterested in epistemology, that he did not write anything on the subject, or that there are no significant points of contact between his approach to epistemological issues and that which one finds in more recent analytic epistemology. In fact, Balthasar's epistemology accords a central place to the notion of evidence, and this interest in evidence is something that he shares with later analytic epistemologists of religion (for a survey of recent trends in analytic epistemology of religion with a particular focus on the notion of evidence, see Smith 2014).

## BALTHASAR'S EPISTEMOLOGY

Unlike many recent contributors to the epistemology of religion, Balthasar is not concerned with the questions of whether or not God exists and whether or not we can know it. Instead, he takes it for granted that God exists and proceeds directly to an inquiry into how one can come to know God. Balthasar's epistemological inquiry is never entirely abstract, but always keeps in view the practical goal of assisting people to live in ways that are more attuned to God's will for them. The result is an epistemology that is unashamedly theological insofar as it begins with unquestioned theological premises. However, Balthasar's epistemology is not merely theological; it is also Christocentric to its core. This is so in at least two important respects: Balthasar describes the content of knowledge in Christocentric terms and he claims that the method of knowledge acquisition requires that the knowing subject is appropriately related to the object of knowledge, that is, to Christ (or, more precisely, to the 'form of Christ').

Despite its undeniably Christocentric character, Balthasar's epistemology remains focused on the human knower—conceived of as the individual Christian who, within the context of the church, actively seeks to discern God's will for his or her life. Nonetheless, Balthasar refuses to consider the human subject in isolation from his or her relationship to God as Creator, which, according to the Christian tradition, is a relationship that all humans share equally. Unlike his famous contemporary, Roman Catholic theologian and fellow Jesuit, Karl Rahner, Balthasar held that it was neither possible nor useful to consider pure human subjectivity. Rahner held that an examination of the latter would reveal a tacit awareness of God present in all human consciousness (see Rahner 1984). Displaying his debt to the Lutheran theologian Karl Barth, Balthasar rejected Rahner's approach; holding instead that the human subject cannot be adequately conceived except as already in a real relationship to God.

Underlying this difference of opinion between Rahner and Balthasar lies a general theological question about how best to explain the distinction between 'nature' and 'grace'. In claiming that one could not neatly separate the human from the human-in-relation-to-God, Balthasar was adopting a specific standpoint within what was a very topical debate at this juncture in Roman Catholic theology. Balthasar elaborates on his understanding of this basic human–divine relationship in his Christocentric anthropology (see Harrison 2000a). His epistemology is framed within the context of this anthropology, and it cannot be adequately appreciated in isolation from this context.

Balthasar's anthropology, like his epistemology, is premised upon his conviction that God exists and is revealed through Christ; hence it is a theological anthropology that is explicitly developed from the standpoint provided by Christian faith. Balthasar held it to be legitimate to deploy faith as an unquestioned presupposition in this way because he judged that conceptions of knowledge which claimed to be independent of revelation, faith, and experience—such as those popularized within German philosophy by Immanuel Kant (1722–1804) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814)—were inadequate tools for understanding what is required for knowledge of God (see Beiser 1987). Balthasar held that an adequate anthropology and epistemology, and, by extension, an adequate theology, require one to accept that faith is a presupposition of knowledge.

More specifically, Balthasar regarded knowledge of God to be the result of experience informed by faith. Knowledge of God emerges from the lived experience of being in a relationship to God—an experience that is only possible to a person of faith (while all humans are de facto in the relationship, not all have opened themselves to the experience of it). Such claims led Balthasar to attend to those people who he took to be consciously enjoying this experience to a particularly intense degree—the saints, although his interest was not exclusively in the canonized Saints (see Harrison 2000a: 50–89). These people, he held, are the ones who know God and consequently they are of enormous importance to theology. Hence, he was concerned to explore what it is that such people know, how they know it, and how what they know might be communicated to others. He explains that:

> [m]uch would appear in a very different light were we [that is, theologians] to apply our reflections on the archetypal function of the saints rather than to the figure presented by the average sinner, for example in the understanding of what a sacrament is and what its reception means. What does it mean for a saint, when he communicates? He should know, and be able to teach us. What is the significance of a Christian life as a witness to Christ? What is its theoretical structure, and how is it realised in practice?
>
> (Balthasar 1989: 200)

We have seen that a specific relationship to God is of paramount importance in Balthasar's epistemology because it is the necessary condition for coming to know

God. In his attempt to give a theological account of what constitutes this relationship, Balthasar focuses his attention on the phenomenology of Christian experience, as this can be investigated in the lives of the saints.

## CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AND THE 'FORM OF CHRIST'

A core premise of Balthasar's Christocentric epistemology is that there is a correspondence between the experience of one who is living as a Christian and the 'form [*Gestalt*] of Christ'. This notion of the 'form of Christ' plays a key role in Balthasar's epistemology, for he employs it to explain how human beings come to know God. Moreover, he holds that it is the Christian life-form (that is, a way of life in which the 'form of Christ' is expressed) which validates the Christian faith, because the Christian life-form is, in a sense, equivalent to the 'form of Christ'. Arguing that the validity of the Christian life-form derives from the union of the divine nature and the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth, Balthasar claims that 'something of the mystery of the hypostatic union can and must be made visible in concrete form to the world through a Christian life lived in an exemplary way' (Balthasar 1982: 214). On his view, then, just as the 'form of Christ' has revelatory power, so too will the Christian life-form be capable of disclosing something about God.

Balthasar considers this correspondence between the way one lives as a Christian and the 'form of Christ' to be a prerequisite for the possibility of knowing God, and he takes it to be primarily a matter of faith that there is such a correspondence. On the basis of this correspondence, he asserts that a subjective condition for theological knowledge is that one lives in such a way as to access the 'form of Christ' through one's experience. But despite this existential condition of knowledge that must be met by the subject, Balthasar holds that the resultant knowledge is not merely subjective. Rather, the 'form of Christ', he claims, contains the objective evidential power of Christian revelation. He further avers that this evidential power is only fully disclosed as it works within the Christian, transforming him or her into ever-greater likeness to Christ.

Balthasar is not concerned with the possibility of acquiring knowledge of God that is merely theoretical in the sense of being detached from the practicalities of living as a Christian. We might say that what concerns him is knowledge acquired through experience. Moreover, he holds that an individual's primary access to God is 'through the medium of his own intentional human acts' (Balthasar 1982: 225)—how that person has chosen to live. This provides Balthasar with further motivation for examining the details of the lives of those who strive to be attuned to God through Christ (Balthasar 1982: 253).

If we want to know, more exactly, what it is to be attuned to God, Balthasar's advice would be that we should attend closely to Christ. This advice brings once more into view the pervasively Christocentric character of his approach to epistemology. What we see in Christ, Balthasar holds, is a man who lived in a perfect relationship to God the Father and who therefore shows us what a perfect human life looks like. Christ's manner of living, which is primarily accessible to us through the texts of the New Testament, laid the foundation for the Christian way of living, which Balthasar describes as the Christian life-form.

The notion of 'life-form' plays such a significant role in Balthasar's theology that some further explanation of what he understands by it is required before proceeding further. Balthasar holds that 'to be a Christian is precisely a form' (Balthasar 1982: 28). He continues:

> This form transcends the questionableness of men's own choices and self-evaluation. It transcends, too, the uncertainty and melancholy that are, at bottom, inherent in most life-forms for the simple reason that something entirely different could have been chosen and that what was intended and striven after was never actually attained. But the Christian life-form is structurally a part of the miracle of the forgiveness of sins, of justification, of holiness, the miracle that transfigures and ennobles the whole sphere of being and which itself guarantees that a spiritual form will thrive as the greatest of beauties.
>
> (Balthasar 1982: 28)

As we have seen, one of Balthasar's key assertions is that it is within the Christian life-form, modelled as it is on the way Christ related to God the Father, that Christians can acquire knowledge of God. He describes those living within the Christian life-form as striving to bring their personal experience into closer and closer attunement to the experience that Christ enjoyed. This striving takes its most obvious form in the effort to imitate Christ, an effort that is supported by the Christian's experience of prayer (Balthasar 1986). One of the fruits of this life of attunement to God is that it allows 'the truthfulness of what is believed to emerge' (Balthasar 1982: 241–2). This occurs because the object of Christian belief itself has a transformative effect on the believing person to the extent that the individual *becomes* the form; he or she becomes Christ-like. If this happens then what is discernible in the way a person lives will disclose the inner reality of the form that has been 'willed and instituted by Christ'. He elaborates:

> The exterior of this form must express and reflect its interior to the world in a credible manner, and the interior must be confirmed, justified, and made love-worthy in its radiant beauty through the truth of the exterior that manifests it. When it is achieved, [the] Christian form is the most beautiful thing that may be found in the human realm.
>
> (Balthasar 1982: 241–2)

Balthasar's discussion of the Christian life-form brings to the fore the significance which reflection upon beauty holds in his theological system as a whole, and in his epistemology in particular. The key claim here is that the Christian life-form is beautiful because it is derived from Christ (see Riches 1986, Murphy 1995, and Nichols 1998). The beauty visible within saintly lives can attract people to the Christian life-form and thereby give them access to the supernatural reality that becomes cognizable within it (see Sherry 1992 and Saward 1997). Balthasar's main idea is that we are attracted by the lives of the saints and this encourages us to imitate them; then, by imitating them, we are drawn into the Christian life-form ourselves which gives us a vantage point from which we can begin to enjoy Christian experience. This experience then confirms for us the truth of Christian doctrine (see Harrison 2000a: 162–87). Balthasar thus portrays the Christian life as following a dynamic trajectory; as one enters more deeply into the life-form, one penetrates further into the truth and meaning of Christian doctrine, which then opens the way for an even fuller Christian experience, and so on.

In effect, Balthasar understands the Christian life as a process through which an individual Christian can become Christ-like in the full sense of having Christ take form in her (Balthasar's conception of this process takes its point of departure from certain key verses in the New Testament, especially, Rom. 8:29, Gal. 2:20 and 4:19, and 2 Cor. 3:18). Saints are those who have gone further along this road than most of us have managed, but Balthasar never portrays them as having actually reached complete perfection—neither morally nor epistemically. During the process of becoming Christ-like the saint struggles, as do all Christians, with imperfect knowledge of God, and she has to act and make decisions based on such knowledge.

In the second part of his trilogy, *Theo-Drama* (1988–98), Balthasar develops an extended metaphor in which he portrays the Christian life as taking place on the stage. This metaphor displays the epistemic limitations that Balthasar regards as intrinsic to the human condition; at least until the individual has become fully conformed to Christ. In a play each actor knows best his or her own role in the story and perhaps has some insight into the roles of the other actors with whom his or her own story is interwoven. But the actors do not have access to a perspective from which the coherence of all the storylines can be appreciated nor can they see how their own role will develop in the future. Only God, as the director of the play, can see how all of the stories which are simultaneously unfolding fit together into a coherent whole over time.

The metaphor of the play rightly leads us to expect that Balthasar's epistemology will be sensitive to person-relative differences that govern what may be known by any particular individual. Any one person's knowledge of God will be limited by the range of their Christian experience and by the role they occupy in 'the play'. Only God, as director of the play, is thought to possess complete knowledge not only of the divine Being but also of the whole play and of the characters acting within it. We might say that only God is in a fully optimal epistemic situation—enjoying comprehensive knowledge—whereas human individuals only have access to a range of knowledge that is subjectively conditioned (in other words, it is the knowledge which is possible relative to their position in the play and their progress in the Christian life).

Balthasar claims that the knowledge available to any individual person living within the Christian life-form, while it is intrinsically tied to the experience which that person has enjoyed, is not *entirely* subjective. This claim is based on his conviction that by participating in the Christian life-form the individual Christian, in taking Christ as her model, opens the way for Christ to act and to know within her. 'Christian experience', he writes, 'can mean only the progressive growth of one's own existence into Christ's existence, on the basis of Christ's continuing action in taking shape in the believer' (Balthasar 1982: 224). Furthermore, Christian experience 'implies a progressive entrance of the believing person into the total reality of faith and the progressive "realisation" of this reality' (Balthasar 1982: 239). In a very real sense then, God is thought to enter into the experiential reality of the believer and to shape that reality—making the Christian increasingly Christ-like. If this process were to be maximally successful, the individual Christian would then have access to the experience of Christ (or, at least, to some portion of it). The further along this road one travels, the less subjectively conditioned and partial, and the more objective and comprehensive, will be the knowledge gained through experience. The objective dimension is provided because what is known is thought to be an objective reality that transforms the knowing subject—potentially to the extent that the knower becomes the object of knowledge (there is a sense in which Christ becomes the real knowing subject in the Christian and Christ is also the object of knowledge). Describing Balthasar's epistemology as Christocentric is clearly no exaggeration.

The Christocentric focus of Balthasar's epistemology notwithstanding, the centrality he accords the Christian life-form within this epistemology may seem rather excessive at first sight. This impression may, however, be mitigated if one takes into account his claim that the Christian life-form is, in an important sense, the content of revelation. Recall that, in Balthasar's account, the Christian life-form is based on the life of Christ. Given that the life of Christ is plausibly regarded as the content of revelation, one can see what leads Balthasar to claim that the Christian life-form is the thing which has been revealed. Balthasar's further claim that Christian revelation is confirmed as true only in the experience of those living within the Christian life-form can also be seen to follow from his understanding of the vital connection between revelation, Christ, and the Christian life-form. It also goes some way to elucidate his remark that living a Christian life constitutes a 'new form of Christian certitude' (Balthasar 1982: 225).

The claim that God is known within Christian experience also explains the interest Balthasar took in what he terms 'spiritual phenomenology'. According to the experience-based epistemological account he has provided, it makes sense that God would primarily be known phenomenologically. Hence, a phenomenological approach to religious knowledge would seem to be the one most likely to provide us with some access to what is known by those living within the Christian life-form. He writes, 'the saints are not given to us to admire for their heroic powers, but that we should be enlightened by them on the inner reality of Christ, both for the better understanding of the faith and for our living thereby in charity' (Balthasar 1989: 204).

Balthasar provided some concrete examples of works in the genre of spiritual phenomenology, most notably his studies of the life of Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of Dijon (Balthasar 1953 and 1956). He was convinced that what could be discovered through careful study of the lives of such exemplary Christian individuals would provide a vital resource for theologians. In the following section I consider this claim, along with Balthasar's proposals for assimilating into theology the knowledge acquired through the experience of holy people.

## HOLINESS AND THEOLOGY

Balthasar's most systematic reflections on the epistemology of theology come to the fore in his various writings on the connection between holiness and theology (see esp. Balthasar 1983, 1987, and 1989). His views, which were explained above, about the experiential precondition for knowledge of God—the object of theology—led to his position on the connection between holiness and theology. In highlighting this connection, Balthasar was responding to what he perceived to be an urgent crisis within theology. He identified two dimensions of the problem: first, that theology had lost its traditional connection to spirituality; and second, that theologians no longer took seriously the requirement that they live holy lives. He held that the result of this situation was that theology was failing its primary intended audience—namely, ordinary Christian people. Balthasar's was a lone voice when he began writing on this topic in the 1940s. However one might say that his voice became part of a choir as the twentieth century progressed (see e.g. Dulles 1992 and Doran 1997). As Balthasar's writings on this topic appeared over several decades it is something of a simplification to regard him as having just one view, but I do so here for the sake of brevity of analysis (for a more nuanced account of his position, see Harrison 2000b).

To address the first dimension of the problem—the gap between theology and spirituality—Balthasar held that an appropriate methodology for theology must be capable of taking seriously the revelation available in 'the constant repetition of the theological existence of the Lord in the life of his faithful and saints' (Balthasar 1987: 204). In the introduction to his book on Thérèse of Lisieux he makes the further claim that, with respect to the saints, 'their sheer existence proves to be a theological manifestation, which contains most fruitful and opportune doctrine' (Balthasar 1953: xvii). In the light of these remarks, which are certainly not atypical within Balthasar's corpus, we can see just how relevant to theology he held the saints to be. The importance he accorded them stems from his belief that genuine Christians express Christian doctrine in how they live their lives (for his most sophisticated expression of this idea, see Balthasar 1982, Ch. 2 'The Subjective Evidence'). Given this view, we can see why Balthasar held that one of the most significant tasks for a theologian was to articulate Christian doctrine as it is expressed in exemplary Christian lives. He regarded this task as too important to be left to those writing 'spirituality' (which he seems to regard as mostly hagiography). In effect, the theologian who does this is able to make that knowledge of God which is directly accessible only through Christian experience available to a wider range of people than would otherwise be the case.

The benefits, however, flow both ways. Balthasar held that theology had become eviscerated by losing the connection that it formerly enjoyed with the Christian life. He wrote extensively on this subject, explaining his understanding of the genesis of the separation (see Harrison 2000a: 201–9) and making proposals to remedy the problem. In the introduction to his book on Thérèse of Lisieux, he declares:

> I believe … that few things are so likely to vitalise and rejuvenate theology, and therefore the whole of Christian life, as a blood-transfusion from hagiography. Yet this must be done as a work of theology; the essence of sanctity has to be grasped as truly evangelical, as belonging to the Church, as a mission and not simply as an individual aesthetic, mystical manifestation.
>
> (Balthasar 1953: xxvi)

In redirecting the attention of theologians away from abstract doctrines and towards those who have lived exemplary Christian lives, Balthasar's aim was twofold. First, he held that the theology that would result from attending to the saints would be highly effective as apologia. Such theology would give people access to the beauty and hence attractiveness of the 'form of Christ' that was expressed within saintly lives. Second, he believed that holy people could be a valuable theological resource that could be used to expand the Christian understanding of revelation. Elaborating on this point, he explains that holy people are:

> a new interpretation of revelation; they bring out the scarcely suspected treasures in the deposit of faith …, their sheer existence proves to be a theological manifestation, which contains most fruitful and opportune doctrine, the directions of the Holy Spirit addressed to the whole Church are not to be neglected by any of its members … . In these saints we are faced with a living and essential expression of the Church's tradition; it is true that this tradition is animated by the Holy Spirit which in every age prompts those in apostolic office or in the hierarchy to *interpret* the scriptural revelation of Christ, but we should not forget that this prompting is equally urgent in the saints, who are the 'living gospel'.
>
> (Balthasar 1953: xv, emphasis in original)

Balthasar's method of spiritual phenomenology is designed to make accessible to theology and its audiences whatever it is that God is revealing in the lives of the saints. Balthasar's understanding of phenomenology broadly follows that of the father of modern phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1970 [1900]). The core of the method is description, which aims to be detailed enough to disclose what people actually experience in the context of, what Husserl termed, their *Lebenswelt* (life-world).

Despite his promotion of spiritual phenomenology, Balthasar clearly believed that a theologian should be more than a mere observer of other people's holy lives. In his writings on this issue he addresses the second dimension of the problem noted above—that theologians no longer took seriously the requirement that they live holy lives. Perhaps

Balthasar's most controversial claims concern his insistence that a genuine theologian must be living a holy life. In Balthasar's view, engaging in theology is to respond to a call from God to bear witness to the truths of revelation. If this is an accurate account of the situation, then, as he writes, the theologian's

> discourse about God (*theo-logia*) will necessarily and analytically be informed by a life dedicated to complete self-giving in order to stand credibly before the world and, if God so wills, to maintain his credibility throughout the ages. And perhaps the degree to which he commits his life to bearing witness will be more fruitful than the limitations of his formulations and deficiencies which one is willing to forgive him because of the integrity of his bearing witness. We might mention the following as examples: Origen, Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Bernanos.
>
> (Balthasar 1987: 346–7)

The theologian's way to pursue his or her own holiness is, then, by practising theology. However, the effectiveness of the theology produced will be crucially dependent, Balthasar insists, on the credibility of the theologian's manner of living. The bar for successful theology is thus set very high indeed; this has raised questions about the relevance of Balthasar's account of theology in an intellectual culture within which theology is often regarded simply as one subject among others in the genre of arts and humanities, and which is now often studied, when it is studied at all, within secular universities.

## Assessing Balthasar's Epistemology

Balthasar's theological epistemology cannot be taken in isolation from his broader theological commitments, especially, as I have shown, his stance on theological anthropology and his Christocentric theological orientation. To a large extent, his ideas form a whole from which it is difficult to disengage individual parts (for an insightful discussion of the significance of the parts and wholes metaphor in Balthasar's thought, see Kilby 2012). This makes it virtually impossible to formulate a summary judgement of his approach to epistemology; hence I will not attempt to do so here. Instead, in this section, I briefly address two criticisms of Balthasar: an objection which challenges the legitimacy of his theological perspective given his own epistemological commitments, and the complaint that his demand for holiness on the part of theologians is too stringent a requirement in the current context.

We have seen that the idea that knowledge of God cannot be independent of Christian experience is fundamental to Balthasar's epistemology; as a corollary of this he also asserts that the knowledge enjoyed by any individual Christian will be relative to the range of that person's experience. This feature of Balthasar's religious epistemology has led to the charge that he is 'caught in a significant performative contradiction: the way his theology is done presumes something which the content of his theology rules out' (see Kilby 2012: 14, 58–65). The core of this objection is that Balthasar presupposes a God's-eye perspective, whereas, given his own epistemological position, he is only entitled to make much more moderate claims—claims based on his own experiential perspective—than those which he does make. The mooted problem is that many of Balthasar's theological claims (claims about the inner working of the Trinity, for example) are so far-reaching that, given his own epistemology, he could not possibly be in a position legitimately to assert them. This criticism of Balthasar seems warranted. However, in his defence, we might note that the problem is indeed 'performative' rather than logical; as such, it resides in Balthasar's tendency to overstretch theologically, rather than in the epistemology which underlies his theology.

The other objection, which does suggest, to some, a lack of plausibility in Balthasar's epistemology, concerns his claim that there is an intrinsic connection between a theologian's manner of life and his or her ability as a theologian. As I have shown, this view is not accidental to Balthasar's theological epistemology, but rather follows from his most basic epistemological commitments. If we accept, as Balthasar does, (i) that the object of theology is God, *theos*, and (ii) that knowledge of God can only be directly acquired through the experience of living a Christian life (he allows that some knowledge may be indirectly acquired through other means), it follows (iii) that full access to the object of theology requires that one live a Christian life. In short, unless a theologian is living a Christian life he or she will lack directly acquired knowledge of the object of theology and hence will be unable to *be* a theologian. It seems that Balthasar is drawing attention to a performative contradiction of his own. If one wishes to reject his view of the requirements placed on a theologian, the most obvious target of criticism will be (ii) that knowledge of God can only be directly acquired through the experience of living a Christian life. But to reject this is tantamount to jettisoning the whole of Balthasar's epistemology, not merely his ideas about the link between theology and a holy Christian life.

## Directions for Future Research

Balthasar's writings offer fertile ground for exploration by those interested in theological epistemology today. His work is often more suggestive than rigorously argued, and he has an often-remarked-upon tendency to adopt positions without adequate defence, such as, for example, his understanding of beauty. It has been suggested that this feature of his work is a result of the distance he deliberately maintained between himself and academic theology (see Kilby 2012). Nonetheless, the way he deploys core epistemological notions, such as evidence, faith, and knowledge, would surely repay careful analysis with the tools of more recent analytic epistemology. (For one such attempt, focused on the notion of rationality, see Harrison 2000a: Ch. 5.)

One area of current interest to epistemologists, which does seem to converge directly with Balthasar's concerns, is the theory known as 'exemplarism'. Exemplarists, such as

Linda Zagzebski, have drawn attention to the vital role of exemplars in the development of moral theory and, more broadly, in the way in which we actually acquire moral knowledge (see Zagzebski 2010). The theoretical work being developed in this area seems to be awaiting application to the epistemology of religion, and much in Balthasar's theology is highly suggestive of an exemplarist approach to theological knowledge that might inform such an application (for one example of how Balthasar's ideas might be applied within an exemplarist framework in the service of interreligious dialogue, see Harrison 2011). Balthasar's work on spiritual phenomenology can be seen as a precursor to the overdue development of more sophisticated exemplarist theories of theological knowledge, and it is here that there seems to be the most immediate scope for the creative deployment of some of his key ideas.

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# PART IV

# EMERGING CONVERSATIONS

# CHAPTER 37

# LIBERATION THEOLOGY

DEVIN SINGH

While liberation theology certainly does have a well-articulated set of epistemological convictions, seldom has its position been explored within the context of analytic philosophy. Its claims to knowledge production and verification have been expressed in terms of dogmatic theology, for instance, or in conversation with 'continental' philosophical traditions such as historical materialism, phenomenology, and existentialism. I will explain some of the reasons for this divergence in what follows, for they are in fact not ancillary to the direction liberation theology has taken in explicating its unique and extremely influential vision for the ways and modes of knowing within theology. Indeed, due to a set of core convictions about how and where knowledge and wisdom are to be found, liberation theology has rarely drawn upon the traditions that characterize the analytical–philosophical explorations of epistemology that dominate the Anglo-American context.

The opportunity for dialogue and bridge-building that a chapter in a volume such as this affords is not to be taken lightly, and the potential stakes are high in an attempt at something of a translation or at least a mediation. It is important for the claims of liberation theology to be considered within an analytical philosophical context, in part because of the challenges to the latter that the former seeks to raise, and also in part because of the opportunity for greater self-reflexivity for liberation theologians as they seek to articulate their epistemological claims in a way that is communicable to analytic philosophers. There is a long history of misunderstanding and mutual neglect on both sides. While I am not prepared to say that a full rapprochement is possible without the potential loss of some meaning (and/or meaningfulness) from one or both linguistic communities, the opportunity for dialogue and fruitful interchange is not to be forsaken.

This chapter has three sections. The first addresses the apparent lack of reflection on epistemology in liberation theology according to the formal terms of analytic philosophy. I explain why this may be so and explore the different directions taken by these two traditions, asking what challenges these differences raise for each field. I turn then to liberation theology's own articulation of what particular questions about knowing matter and why. I will primarily limit myself to Latin American liberation theology, as traditionally expressed in some of its earlier articulations. I attend to several questions about knowledge and ways of knowing raised by such presentations. My final section suggests possible meeting points: ways liberation theology might be approached and appreciated from an analytical perspective, what benefits might be available to liberation theologians through articulating claims in more typically analytical fashion, and what challenges might be posed for analytic epistemology from a liberationist perspective. In keeping with the scope and purposes of this volume, I explore liberation theology within the context of the epistemology of *theology* and hence will not examine all the various problems of knowledge that might arise in or be addressed by this movement. In other words, I intend to examine the case for theological knowledge acquisition, formation, and articulation as expressed in this theological perspective.

## Two Traditions

In a foundational essay, liberation theologian Jon Sobrino (1984) provides a schematic assessment of two major traditions of European philosophy as they relate to concerns for liberation within Latin American ecclesial contexts. He differentiates between Kant and Marx, who serve as symbols or ciphers for two philosophical moments and resultant approaches. Both can be positioned in relation to Enlightenment developments in philosophy, and each signifies a particular accent or emphasis in modern approaches to knowledge and its relationship to the human condition and to society. Sobrino explains why Marxist philosophical currents have been more appealing to liberation theology and also provides a portrait of what the Kantian tradition represents from a Latin American liberationist perspective.

Kant signifies a tradition of privileging abstraction, universality, and the refinement of reason in the 'pure' realm of thought. Kantian philosophy emphasizes both the formalization and systemization of ideas as well as the way the coherence of a system corresponds to the logical and stable configuration of reality. Kant can certainly be used to invoke liberation. Such liberation, however, is depicted as freedom from tradition and imposed modes of knowledge. The concern here is to see that the knowing subject reaches maturity through the independent use of reason. Thinking rightly about the world is the end goal and highest good of this method. The 'break' or distance that the knowing subject achieves from the world is used to assume a critical and objective stance towards it, in order to categorize and comprehend it. If there is a crisis or central problem to which this approach responds, it is the 'crisis of meaning', the need to understand rightly.

Marx, as a later moment in Enlightenment philosophy, represents a view that philosophical reflection, the world, and history are in constant relation, such that development and change remain at the heart of this approach. As his famous 'Thesis 11' on Feuerbach asserts, the chief aim of philosophy is world transformation of social systems that inhibit life's flourishing, not simply theoretical reflection and description. This view regards praxis as key, as the critical site of philosophical activity and not simply one application of philosophy among many. The crisis to which Marxist thought responds is that of wretched and unjust material conditions, and the object is a change of such realities. Such a goal is deemed possible precisely because of this integral relation between philosophy, the world, and history such that changes in one register denote changes in another. The evolving interrelation of thought and reality, often termed dialectical reason, provides a basis for transformation.

While Latin American thinkers certainly do not reject Kant and his legacy, and, as Sobrino notes, employ such approaches, early liberation theologians were quickly confronted by the grim realities and social situations around them. Concerns of meaning within a theoretical realm, or placing priority on refined systems of thought, appeared secondary to more pressing concerns that life itself not be eradicated. While crises of meaning and understanding remain significant, they are subsumed under the larger crisis of life. Within a theological context, this means that questions about the existence of God need to be placed within a broader framework, where the question about the existence of humanity and, in particular, the poor and oppressed, is of greater urgency. Independent theorems or proofs designed to refute or vindicate atheism, for instance, need recontextualization in the face of social systems that put the future of poor communities into question. The problem, therefore, is not first about the death of God but the death of the poor (Sobrino 1984: 30).

Broadly speaking, analytical philosophical traditions have taken a cue from Kant and focused on the relationship between language, logic, and 'pure reason' (e.g. Ayer 1966). Indeed, by often deliberately bracketing off questions of change and matters of 'the world', many analytical approaches appear antithetical to the concerns of liberation theology. The world, society, and its social structures are often taken as a given, as fixed, or as irrelevant, and ideas are worked out formally in the name of logical coherence alone. Taken most innocently, this approach is seen as neglectful of the lived realities faced by millions and appears irrelevant to their situation. More problematically, such approaches are seen as ideologically masking the unjust realities at work, since they take various social structures—with their corresponding conceptual systems—for granted. Left unaddressed are the social locations of philosophers and their projects, as well as the social causes and effects of philosophical systems. Such approaches risk reproducing philosophy as a bourgeois practice, as an activity of thinking about the world made possible by the leisure afforded a privileged class, without regard to the methods and means by which such leisure and privilege were achieved.

Marxist philosophy and other continental traditions, in contrast, hold that practical relations, physical and material activity, and one's place in the world, for instance, are constitutive of one's philosophical attitudes and activities. To reflect formally on modes of knowing and reasoning apart from attention to the (social, political, or historical) determining factors of knowledge is to truncate such reflection itself. It is not simply a matter of philosophy ignoring the social world as one potential realm of application of the concepts it clarifies or produces. Through neglect of the social origins of thought, the philosophical process itself is short-changed. Furthermore, such failure to address philosophy's social base and ongoing relation to the world provides a veneer of legitimation to whatever current arrangement of power is deemed 'natural' and upon which an apparently otherwise logical and coherent analytical approach is built. To validate a particular system of thought analytically, when its social conditions are ignored, is tacitly to grant legitimacy to such contextual factors. Thus, even if analytical approaches have no nefarious intentions, when a system is 'proven' formally and in abstraction, without accounting for its concrete, material influences and outcomes, such approaches risk providing an indirect justification for such realities in the world. Along such lines, developments in the realm of social epistemology (e.g. Goldman 1999; Haddock et al. 2010), while laudably attending to corporate mechanisms of knowing, rarely focus upon the potentially distortive effects of injustice upon knowledge formation.

Given the concerns that certain philosophical traditions may be neglectful of social reality and in this way reproduce unjust social structures and life patterns, liberation theology has tended to engage philosophy that is openly aimed towards social transformation. From its development in the mid twentieth century and through its later iterations, philosophical and theoretical conversation partners have remained those of continental, historically and sociopolitically oriented traditions. A significant exception here is the work of Enrique Dussel (1985 and 1996), whose stature and impact within the fields of liberation philosophy and liberation theology cannot be ignored. Dussel has engaged in an ongoing conversation with philosophers of language like Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas and has attempted to demonstrate through the pragmatics of language the necessities of an emancipatory project. The orientation and tenor of his project, however, remain rooted in Marxist and later Frankfurt School concerns for liberation, even as semiotics, hermeneutics, and linguistic theory are brought to bear on these conversations.

What is important about Sobrino's schematization of these two philosophical traditions, however it may risk caricature, is that it helps to relativize analytic philosophy within a larger landscape of approaches. Despite its claims to objectivity, neutrality, and universality, analytic philosophy's modes of expression represent one kind of language game. Indeed, the shift in perspective called for here might be signalled in shorthand by the purported differences between the early and later Wittgenstein. The Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* (1960) typically signifies a confidence in analytical methods, where reality coincides with its logical and formal representation in one type of language, one manner of speaking (i.e. logical positivism). That which falls outside such a scope must be 'passed over in silence'. The Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* (1997) is often taken to signify the acceptance that multiple language games or self-enclosed and self-referential sets of discourses exist, such that prioritizing one discourse as the privileged access to reality is specious. By not engaging in typically analytic modes of self-presentation, therefore, liberation theology has not neglected epistemological questions. If anything, such differentiation is fully intentional and is assumed as a type of prophetic stance against what are seen as the potential risks of a narrow devotion in epistemology to analytic philosophy.

## THEORY, METHOD, AND PRAXIS

According to liberation theology, theology is or should be a 'critical reflection on praxis'. This is the goal, method, and criterion of all theologizing. It is not to be limited to one perspective or approach within a field of theological options. Liberation theology certainly acknowledges that many such approaches exist, but its claim and plea is that the perspective it sets forth should become fundamental to all theological reflection. It thus establishes a clear normative vision for method in theology and for an ideal epistemological process in the establishment of theological claims and the furtherance of understanding.

Praxis figures centrally here and is proffered as primary and foundational. According to Clodovis Boff (1987)—who perhaps more than any other liberation theologian has articulated the epistemological criteria for liberation theology—praxis itself is multilayered and textured. At a basic level, it is a kind of practical activity and orientation. It is not arbitrary, however, but is directed and informed, and involves a basic commitment to the poor and oppressed, to their plight, and to their liberation. Praxis is certainly not unthinking or unreflective activity, but in the hierarchy or cycle of theological processes its *active* aspect must be emphasized. 'Concrete liberation theology supposes a practical relation with practice, and not a merely theoretical (thematic) relation. It implies a living contact with the struggle of the poor' (Boff 1993: 64). Praxis involves a call to obedience and a faith response. While it precedes theologizing (formally if not always temporally), it does not take place in a theoretical or practical vacuum. A variety of 'first order' factors like individual and communal experience, scriptural reflection, magisterial and pastoral exhortation, and preceding ecclesial practice—all elements considered to varying degrees as part of the canon of tradition in Christian theology—contribute to the posture taken in praxis as a commitment to the poor and oppressed. Indeed, Latin American liberation theology, as largely a development within Roman Catholicism, takes questions of canonicity very seriously. Amidst various charges of innovation and heterodoxy, liberation theologians overall have endeavoured to defend liberation theology's continuity with ecclesial tradition and its conformity to canon. Questions of 'canon and criterion' (see Abraham 1998) therefore also figure centrally in any epistemological assessment of liberation theology.

Liberation theology claims that this canonical formation, coupled with a faith response, leads to adopting the posture of a 'preferential option for the poor'. This is still at the level of praxis and speaks to a fundamental commitment, life orientation, and consequent world view. It comes as the result of the micro-level practices and beliefs that comprise canonical and ecclesial formation. As such, praxis involves personal transformation: a change in outlook, alignment, and possibly social location of the theologian. This may also be a source of liberation theology's resistance to analytic formalization, due to the ways the latter approach risks ossifying the fluidity and dynamism of lived life. A focus on the priority of personal transformation in relationships and communities speaks to materiality and an organicism of experience that defy attempts to capture such life in models and algorithms. Hence, liberation theology's 'root' theological act 'contains something of the pre-theological: the encounter with the poor, and the shock, the rebellion, and the commitment of this encounter'. Indeed, '[t]he radical originality of the theology of liberation lies in the *insertion of the theologian in the real life of the poor*, understood as a collective, conflictive, and active (the poor as subject or agent) reality' (Boff 1993: 66, emphasis in original). Thus, praxis involves solidarity and struggle—a particular lived experience that contributes to new postures of thought and conceptual formations.

Such direct experience is so central that Boff outlines three ways in which theologians might have this necessary contact with the poor: periodic short-term trips to poor communities to build relationships and learn through experience and observation; cyclical or seasonal periods of extended visits to live and work among and with the poor; or a total, ongoing lifestyle among the poor with infrequent withdrawals for reflection (Boff 1993: 74). These options denote the spectrum of requisite experience and encounter necessary to generate the theological knowledge and vision that is at the heart of liberation theology. Once again, liberation theologians claim that such a foundational encounter is not optional (thus, it is important to note that the 'option' in 'preferential option for the poor' indicates a 'having opted for' that is not one possibility among many). Such an option is requisite, and remains so for all theological activity. This posture, pattern, and experience of commitment to the poor and oppressed, demonstrated in life in relationship with them, is so central that it promises to be the conversion of theology.

Personal transformation, therefore, is a prerequisite for theological reflection and production. 'It is something in the theologian rather than in the theology' (Boff 1993: 66). Epistemological considerations arise concerning what is being claimed as necessary for theological knowledge acquisition and expression. What epistemic criteria are implied here? For instance, with the call to a new pattern of life, and correlative new practices and social networks, questions of knowing in relation to habit, character, and self-formation arise. In what sense is what is being set forth here similar to or distinct from questions of wisdom and virtue in epistemology? Alternatively, how do new relational patterns and alignments foster new modes of thought? Is this a subset of an appeal to experience? Or is it perhaps a form of reliabilism, in which external criteria must be in play in order for reasoning to proceed correctly and in a trustworthy manner? Or is the claim empirical in a 'brute' materialist manner, asserting that actual physical contact and direct observation provide access to knowledge not available otherwise?

Furthermore, because of the centrality of struggle and the reality that alignment with the poor usually leads to resistance or other forms of hardship, not the least of which is shared poverty, in what ways is suffering uniquely disclosive? Suffering in various forms remains at the heart of many theological visions in Christianity, and thus the question of the epistemological value of suffering raised by liberation theology is important for wider conversations as well (Chopp 1986). Is suffering necessary for knowing in certain ways? Does suffering provide access to knowledge- and value-forming experiences and insights not available otherwise?

A crucial point that Boff raises is that praxis in itself is insufficient for the acquisition and further generation of theological knowledge. As foundational and constitutive of the theological task as it is, and as central a role as it plays in knowledge acquisition and formulation, praxis is one step in the epistemological process. It serves as a necessary precondition and prepares us to know. Again, questions arise about how and in what way. What does such preparation look like in terms of epistemological categories and processes? What steps in apprehension, understanding, and knowing have already taken place to make praxis possible? How does practice then reinforce or alter the preceding process, and what are the subsequent steps in knowledge formation?

While I explore many of these questions in the next section, in the context of a dialogue with analytical epistemology, from the perspective of liberation theology we can say that one's network of relationships, one's posture of activity in the world, and even one's bodily location all impact knowledge formation. While liberation theology generally upholds a correspondence theory of truth, arguing for a stable and external reality with which true statements coincide, it also embraces perspectivism in the sense that one's location, especially as socially, politically, and economically defined, aids or impedes one's ability to form and/or recognize such truth statements. Certain criteria should be in place—such as alignment with the poor and the experience of political or spiritual opposition—as elements that add to the reliability of one's claims and of one's understanding of the claims of others.

In this sense, at least, suffering aids in epistemic certainty by increasing the reliability of one's claims. Here liberation theology can be seen as developing a scriptural principle of suffering or persecution as a mark of authentic discipleship (Mt. 5:10–12; Jn. 15:18–19). Such criteria, while helping to confirm one's identity as aligned with a particular group or cause, can be extended to serve as additional supports for arguments made by members of this identity set. In this case praxis, and the hardship and resistance that come with it, serve as a fundamental epistemological step needed in verification and corroboration of claims made.

But this is insufficient, for as noted praxis is not simply a condition for knowledge, as some type of external criterion, but is itself generative of knowledge. In this sense it may be categorized as part of the pre-reflective processes necessary for forming impressions and then statements about the world. It is not merely a type of guarantee, minimal baseline, or simple mechanism to increase the reliability of statements, but is integral to the content of such statements as well. It remains the task of theology to bring to light such content, from the mundane to the radical and exceptional, as it emerges in praxis and practical activity (Bedford 2011).

This leads us to consider the secondary movement within the central claim that liberation theology is 'critical reflection on praxis'. What does such critical reflection entail? The emphasis on praxis remains, such that reflection is considered active and engaged, as itself a type of praxis, one that is slightly at a remove from the fundamental posture of engaged commitment to and life among, with, and for the poor. While traditional theology has placed an emphasis on orthodoxy, right thinking, and a correct body of doctrine, liberation theologians emphasize orthopraxy, right action, and practice. Straying too far in the direction of critical reflection, such that thought becomes the end, leads us into an imbalanced emphasis on orthodoxy. Hence, critical reflection remains bound by the priorities of orthopraxy. This is not to say that correct thinking is unimportant, and liberation theology is often caricatured as being unconcerned with fidelity to certain theological or ecclesial claims taken to be normative for various communities or traditions. But this is not so. The point here is that thought must serve, stem from, and lead to action, such that what is 'ortho' or correct, just, and proper, is best produced by, tested, and demonstrated in action.

Typically, three moments of critical reflection are differentiated in liberation theology (Boff 1987; Boff and Boff 1987). These follow from the prior response of faith and commitment to the poor as manifested in praxis. Socio-analytical mediation involves the use of social and critical theory, various lenses through which to analyse a particular situation. A posture of *seeing* is emphasized, where observation and understanding are prioritized. The theologian may draw on whatever tools lend themselves to critical analysis: digging into root causes, assessing structural and institutional realities, mapping social and interpersonal dynamics, or considering historical influences, for instance. Since liberation theology takes the cause of the poor and oppressed as central, shedding light on situations of injustice and oppression is a central task of this analytical stage. The centrality of a life of commitment to and among the poor here emerges in the possibility of simply listening to the poor as a step in the work of social analysis. Gaining insight from their perspective, experiences, and descriptions aids the theologian in building a picture of the situation. Marxism, of course, has served as a central tool used by liberation theologians to assess the plight of the marginalized, a practice that has been the source of much criticism. But liberation theologians emphasize that Marxism is just one instrument among many (Dussel 1993). Many other socio-analytic tools are drawn upon, including broader economic theory, world systems analysis, as well as the sociology of knowledge. Furthermore, Marxist theory is recruited at this stage of preliminary observation and analysis, rather than during evaluation—which is to say that theologians will draw their cues for value judgement from other sources.

This leads us to the next stage of critical reflection, that of hermeneutical or theological mediation. Here *judging* is prioritized, as various resources in Christian tradition are mobilized to evaluate the social situation as described by socio-analytical method and informed through life lived in solidarity with the poor. Visions of what constitutes the good are formulated here, providing a vantage point from which to critique the current situation and chart potential courses of action. At this stage, the theologian might engage typical loci cited as authoritative or determinative for the formation of doctrine, such as scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. This might alternatively be described as simply engaging the canon. Liberation theologians endeavour to take canon seriously and show why scripture, previous magisterial teaching, ecclesial reflection and practice, pastoral exhortation, and dogmatic theology should lead towards the ends advocated by liberation theology. Major conferences of Latin American bishops, such as Medellín in 1968 and Puebla in 1979, provided opportunities for communal and ecclesially based engagements with canon and contemporary church teaching. Various programmatic statements were issued that serve as ongoing touchstones for reflection and evaluation. Critical here is the hermeneutical privilege and priority given to the poor. Praxis reveals its ongoing presence, for the engagement of canon is approached from the location and perspective of the oppressed. Scripture is read with an eye towards God's liberating word for the poor, and scriptural interpretations made by the poor are given a leading role as material for theological formulation.

The third stage of critical reflection is practical mediation. *Acting* is given central focus, as the hermeneutical circle, which began in praxis, returns to praxis with deeper self-awareness. Having passed through the stages of socio-theoretical assessment and theological evaluation, the liberation theologian engages in renewed commitment to the cause of the poor, which in turn fuels new reflection. Zoë Bennett (2007) clarifies that while praxis, as a practical activity, is akin to the focus on practice in certain forms of pastoral education and practical theology, it remains distinct. While the latter emphasize the importance of engagement, relationship-building, and experience as epistemologically crucial and productive, they do not necessarily stipulate solidarity with the poor and oppressed. Multiple types of alignments are possible and action in general is construed as generative of new forms of knowledge. For liberation theology, however, it is not simply practice per se or a focus on practical modes of knowing, but reflection and knowledge that stem from commitment to, solidarity with, and praxis on behalf of the poor and oppressed.

Epistemological concerns are central to liberation theology, given the perspectival shift it calls for. Assuming a stance of solidarity with the poor and oppressed, and granting them a type of hermeneutical privilege that then informs theological reflection, means new starting points for knowledge production. The preferential option for the poor is an expression of life alignment and commitment as well as a claim about norms and criteria for theological knowledge. The poor are not the totality of such sources and norms. They are, however, a critical and central criterion, which, in conversation with canonical, philosophical, and socio-theoretical sources, and through the eyes of faith, provides a basis for theology. 'Critical reflection on praxis' encapsulates the primary process of knowing and formulating theological claims within such an orientation. As noted, such claims have seldom been articulated in formal terms according to analytic philosophical categories, but more within calls to faithful response and charges to obedience within a canonical Christian tradition.

## The Epistemology of Liberation

What relation might liberation theology have to other forms of or approaches to epistemology? Given the priority placed on a certain personal transformation required of the theologian and consequent life (re)alignment, what relation does liberation epistemology have, for instance, to virtue theories of knowing? Discussions of virtue in ethics (e.g. MacIntyre 1981) are concerned more with intellectual processes, whether mental categories or habits of mind, that are deemed epistemologically necessary or important.

They highlight possible intellectual virtues, such as perception, memory, and coherence, that should be present in order for beliefs to be justified and knowledge to be deemed reliable (Greco 2002). Some theorists see a direct relation between the moral or ethical virtues as developed in a person and the intellectual virtues that must also be present (Zagzebski 1996). Such so-called responsibilists argue for postures of attentiveness or inquisitiveness, for instance, as necessary or ideal epistemic virtues.

Liberation theology resonates at a general level with virtue ethics approaches to the extent that certain ethical patterns are invoked and deemed necessary in any account of the knowledge claimed within such a system. If there are virtues articulated in relation to knowledge in liberation theology, they are those of service, sacrifice, suffering, and solidarity on behalf of the poor. These postures must remain in place as various theological statements are being formed and claims to knowledge made. Such attitudes and orientations provide a litmus test of sorts—a ground of validity for ensuing propositions and conceptual systems. These are a type of first principle, and serve as a starting point upon which various claims to truth and action are made. At the other end of the spectrum is another such litmus test: do the claims made serve the cause of liberation of the poor? Are the systems liberatory? This is a virtue of application not unlike a pragmatic test of truth, but one tied to a moral claim—that of justice for the poor.

In relation to virtue epistemology, more specifically, liberation theology shares attributes with responsibilist approaches that emphasize a character of mind and inquiry that should be present in the knowing process. Within the sphere of epistemic responsibility, traits should exist such as compassion for and attentiveness to the poor and marginalized in society, in addition to epistemic virtues like courage, impartiality, or conscientiousness, for instance. These need not simply be moral categories or postures but can be construed as forms of openness to such sources of knowledge. Epistemological virtue and responsibility in this case include turning towards and being open to the insights, input, and experience of the oppressed.

A major position within conversations in epistemology is that of coherentism, which at a basic level makes the coherence of a belief or system of beliefs a major test of truthfulness. Critics point out that logical and coherent beliefs can certainly be false based upon faulty premises, and that otherwise rational individuals might be mistaken in perceptions that ground an apparently coherent set of claims. A version of Descartes's 'evil demon' hypothesis, as a ground for certain forms of scepticism, might be invoked as a reason to contest a set of apparently coherent and rational beliefs, since they could be premised upon a deception or mistaken perception. The system cannot be evaluated on its own, but in relation to some external criteria and often in relation to its correspondences with other claims, systems, or perceptions.

Liberation theology's concerns about ideology resonate with certain aspects of this critique of coherentism. Drawing from Marxist theory's claim that particular social conditions perpetuate belief systems that may mask and reproduce unjust conditions, and adding in biblical and theological concerns about sin as potentially distortive of perception and knowledge, liberation theology issues the caution that very persuasive beliefs may be false. Here it aligns with social epistemological attentiveness to corporate modes of knowing and the influence of context upon individual knowledge processes. It proceeds with a hermeneutic of suspicion that asks about the power interests that are served by various claims to knowledge, and sheds light on the possible contextual motivating factors that drive them. The Cartesian evil demon in this case would not so much be individualistically construed as either demonic deception or mental illness, for instance, but presented socially and communally as ideological distortion (see e.g. Hinkelammert 1986). Such an evil demon might then correspond to the 'principalities and powers', understood scripturally, sociopolitically, and economically, that lead to a misrecognition of particular social arrangements. A set of beliefs deeming poverty 'natural', for instance, while they might form a logically ordered set of premises and conclusions, would fail the test of truthfulness for the ways they obscure the social conditions and ideas that create and enforce exploitative social patterns. A coherent argument defending the 'naturalness' and justifiability of poverty could be falsified, for example, by an appeal to external criteria about the immorality of such poverty, its destruction of life, or its departure from canonical claims.

Liberation theology, at least in its more traditional and earlier articulations, shares much with a foundationalist perspective. Such a perspective appeals at some point to basic criteria, such as empirical observations, properly basic beliefs, protocol sentences, etc. that ground an ensuing set of claims and system of beliefs. Reformed epistemology, in particular, seeks to include certain supernatural or non-verifiable claims as part of admissible basic beliefs (Clark 1990; Plantinga 2000). Belief in God, for instance, would be a central, properly basic belief that could serve as a legitimate ground and criterion for other claims. Liberation theology's appeal to an initial response in faith and alignment with the poor as a prerequisite to proper theologizing brings it into the orbit of such conversations. By invoking the canon, as well as fundamental claims such as God's solidarity with the poor and oppressed, liberation theology appeals to basic beliefs as well as a fundamental structure to reality. To the degree that lives and actions correspond to this reality, they are deemed true and, more importantly, just.

Ideological distortion, then, is contrasted with a clear view of reality, a view informed by canonical claims about God and justice, as well as by social analysis of conditions that perpetuate injustice. To be sure, reality is in flux and dialectical reason promotes ongoing transformation through praxis and reflection, but foundational claims about the righteousness of God who sides with the marginalized remain as guideposts for resultant theological programmes. Such claims to theological correspondence with a divine reality are typically couched, however, in theological traditions of apophasis and negative theology, such that simple assurances of exact description are challenged. Certainty is directed away from the language of theology, and hence from the authority or purported truthfulness of sentences, towards God as the object of faith and hope.

Yet, more than such basic beliefs, liberation theology's foundationalism might be called praxeological. Although the claims I have recalled—such as God's liberatory work on behalf of the poor and oppressed—matter greatly, priority is given to orthopraxis over orthodoxy. We might then speak of properly basic postures and actions as part of the foundationalism invoked by liberation theology in its epistemological programme. Such might remain some of its more provocative challenges for wider conversations in epistemology and analytic philosophy. While the nature of thought and cognitive belief have been plumbed and thoroughly investigated (though, of course not solved), much remains to be explored about the nature of bodily activity, material engagement, and action itself as constitutive of epistemic processes. Here liberation theology's claims provide one such starting point. How might embodied, material knowledge, revealed in action rather than propositional claims, be posited as a legitimate foundation to conceptual systems? How might the transformation of reality, rather than an appeal to its fixed and stable structure, serve as the litmus test for truth in a set of beliefs?

No doubt much work needs to be done towards fruitful dialogue between liberation theology and wider, analytically driven conversations about epistemology. The foregoing are simply a few potential points of contact, where liberation theology's epistemological claims might be conveyed in language more familiar to analytic philosophy. While liberation theology prioritizes praxis and calls for transformative action on behalf of the poor and oppressed, it in no way eschews rigorous thought, and it draws upon a rich tradition of theological, philosophical, and socio-theoretical reflection. The exercise of expressing some of its claims in the formal terms of analytic philosophy, as it has evolved in certain Anglo-American conversations about epistemology, may self-reflexively help its own self-articulation and refinement. Liberation theologians with interests in epistemology might take up aspects of this conversation, both to clarify—or at least express alternatively—their own terms of engagement, as well as to increase the potential range of support and solidarity for their project. At the same time, such an encounter issues its own important challenge to conversations within analytic philosophy, where concerns for the social location and impact of thought systems may be missed, suppressed, or abstracted away. Liberation theology may help issue the reminder that such theorizations, however abstract, are done by humans for humans, and that universal claims will circle back and touch down in reality, for good or for ill.

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## CHAPTER 38

# CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

J. AARON SIMMONS

## Introduction: Obstacles from the Outset

Attempting to think through the contributions that continental philosophy can make to the epistemology of theology might initially seem to be a strange task in at least two ways. On the one hand, continental philosophy is often characterized as a sustained challenge to what Charles Taylor terms 'the epistemological tradition' (Taylor 1987). In his essay 'Overcoming Epistemology', Taylor cites Hegel, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and the later Wittgenstein as four of the 'most important and influential critics of epistemology', and he then mentions Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida as all continuing this critical trend (Taylor 1987: 473). Accordingly, rather than being seen as a productive resource for epistemology, continental philosophy is far more often viewed (from both the inside and outside) as a challenge to it. Perhaps not surprisingly, despite some notable exceptions of continental philosophers being quite deeply interested in epistemological issues (consider e.g. the work of Edmund Husserl and that of Michèle Le Doeuff 2003; see also Alcoff 1996; Westphal 1999), not many essays have been written addressing the positive continental contributions to epistemology.

On the other hand, turning to continental philosophy to find such epistemological resources is difficult because there is no *single* thing rightly designated as 'continental philosophy'. Rather, so-called continental philosophy is a term that refers to a wide variety of philosophical movements (critical theory, deconstruction, existentialism, phenomenology, French feminism, psychoanalysis, etc.) that all converge and diverge in complicated ways. For example, though Derrida's critique of logocentrism certainly appropriates some aspects of Foucault's account of power/knowledge, he does not operate according to the generally genealogical methodology of Foucault, preferring instead the phenomenological methodology of Husserl and Heidegger. Alternatively, Levinas and Derrida share much when it comes to the priority of ethics to epistemology, say, but the former does not share the latter's view that psychoanalysis is a good place to turn for thinking through what ethical life might involve. Further, Gianni Vattimo shares Derrida's deep appreciation of Heidegger, but does so more through Nietzsche than through Husserl. Moreover, just as in analytic philosophy, within continental philosophy one can find defenders of realism, anti-realism, internalism, externalism, infinitism, coherentism, contextualism, etc. Additionally, continental philosophers variously contribute to nearly every philosophical subdiscipline: philosophy of language, moral philosophy, political philosophy, logic, philosophy of religion, aesthetics, etc. Many more examples could be offered, but the point is that, like 'analytic' philosophy, 'continental' philosophy is a loose designator that is frequently more of a distraction than an aid in critical thinking. Although I will continue to refer to analytic and continental as if they were stable (and distinct) traditions in this chapter, this is simply for the sake of clarity. I should also note that, for the sake of brevity, I will focus primarily on the phenomenological tradition(s) within continental philosophy as the main exemplar for possible sites of engagement with the contemporary debates in philosophical theology.

In order to productively think about continental *approaches* to the epistemology of theology, then, it is important to begin by admitting that continental philosophers rarely think explicitly enough about matters of concern to contemporary epistemology, and non-continental philosophers rarely think explicitly enough about the diversity and complexity of continental philosophy. With that said, my goals in this chapter are quite modest. First, through an engagement with an essay by Nicholas Wolterstorff, I will argue that the fact that philosophical theology has thrived more prominently in analytic than in continental philosophy is not reflective of some essential resistance to philosophical theology within continental philosophy itself. Second, I will indicate specific ways in which continental philosophy might contribute to discussions concerning the epistemology of theology—focusing on debates concerning foundationalism, experience, revelation, and realism/anti-realism. Admittedly, this chapter is merely a first step towards thinking through continental contributions to the epistemology of theology. The important work, that which not only suggests possible contributions but also explores them in detail, will have to occur elsewhere. Hopefully, though, this chapter will motivate such work.

## Prospects for Philosophical Theology within Continental Philosophy

In his contribution to the important volume *Analytic Theology* (Crisp and Rea 2009), Nicholas Wolterstorff provides a detailed account of how philosophical theology emerged and eventually flourished within twentieth-century analytic philosophy. As he explains, '[n]ever since the late Middle Ages has philosophical theology so flourished as it has during the past thirty years', and yet this flourishing has 'occurred within the analytic tradition of philosophy; thus far, there has been no counterpart flourishing within the continental tradition' (Wolterstorff 2009: 155). If one accepts Wolterstorff's assessment, which I am inclined to do, it is important to ask whether this reality reflects something contingent or necessary. Importantly, Wolterstorff rightly recognizes both the work of Jean-Luc Marion, and also the recent suggestions that there has been a 'turn to religion' within some areas of continental philosophy, as possible counterexamples to the general resistance to philosophical theology (Wolterstorff 2009: 155). It is difficult, though, to reconcile Wolterstorff's claim with Oliver Crisp's suggestion in the same volume that 'most contemporary theologians take their philosophical cues from continental philosophy' (Crisp 2009: 37). I imagine that Crisp is either referring technically to the work of radical theologians such as Thomas Altizer and Don Cupitt, process theologians such as Catherine Keller, and the emerging idea of 'weak theology' proposed variously by Charles Winquist, John Caputo, and others, or more informally to the frequent mention of such continental thinkers as Heidegger and Derrida at American Academy of Religion meetings. That said, if Crisp is right, then it looks like Wolterstorff's assessment that philosophical theology has not flourished in continental philosophy is mistaken. Ultimately, when deciding things on this front, quite a bit depends on what one counts as 'theology'. For my part, I take theology to require a particular conception of evidential authority such that revelation, sacred texts, ecclesial proclamations, etc. are *immediately* evidentiary in ways that they are not for philosophers. In that sense, then, Wolterstorff is right to say that there is *not much* continental philosophical theology. If, alternatively, theology is taken to mean *any* generally academic reflection on God that occurs outside of a philosophy department, then perhaps Crisp is right to point to the generally continental trajectory of such work.

Regardless, it is important to ask whether there is an *essential* resistance to theology in continental thought or not. In answering this question, I hope to take up the invitation offered by Wolterstorff to those working in continental philosophy 'to develop these suggestions in detail—or propose other explanations' (Wolterstorff 2009: 156). Impressively, Wolterstorff's account avoids what many such comparative accounts do not: a straw-man construction either of analytic philosophy as overly technical and existentially irrelevant, or of continental philosophy as opaque, nonrigorous, and necessarily sceptical (for examples of a continental straw-man of analytic philosophy, see Caputo 2002; Trakakis 2008; for an example of an analytic straw-man of continental philosophy, see Rauser 2009). Such characterizations have led many to claim that analytic philosophy of religion and continental philosophy of religion are decidedly distinct, and likely at odds with each other. Consider Philip Goodchild's claim that:

> philosophy of religion, in English-speaking countries, has a clear and distinct identity, and has been enjoying a resurgence: it focuses largely on the truth-claims, rationality, and coherence of religious propositions, and particularly those of 'classical

> theism'. Yet, for those who work in the tradition of philosophy derived from Germany and France, the problems, tasks, concepts, reasoning, and cultural location are *markedly different* from this identity.
>
> (Goodchild 2002: 1–2, emphasis added)

To his credit, though drawing important distinctions, Wolterstorff's account does not give in to such suggestions of oppositional necessity.

Wolterstorff's general proposal is quite striking in that he basically charges continental philosophy with failing to be postmodern enough! 'My central thesis', he writes, 'will be that the flowering of philosophical theology was made possible by the surrender, by analytic philosophers, of certain assumptions characteristic of philosophy in the modern period, and by the emergence of a new understanding of the task of philosophy and its role in culture' (Wolterstorff 2009: 156). In this way, Wolterstorff concurs with the assessment of C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal that '[t]wentieth century epistemology … can be described as the movement away from the Enlightenment view of reason as pure and self-contained to variations on the Humean theme of the indigence of reason. This in turn has created a new context for the philosophy of religion' (Evans and Westphal 1993: 2). In contrast to Wolterstorff, however, Evans and Westphal stress that such a movement can be found in '*both* the "analytic" and the "Continental" traditions' (Evans and Westphal 1993: 2, emphasis added).

According to Wolterstorff's account, there are two key ways in which the modernist legacy has been overcome more effectively by analytic philosophers than by continental philosophers: the first has to do with the limits of the thinkable and the second has to do with the nature of philosophy. According to Wolterstorff, continental philosophers are still engaged with the modern affirmation of 'limits of the thinkable and the assertable' (Wolterstorff 2009: 157). Taking its cue from the 'demise of logical positivism', Wolterstorff claims, analytic philosophy is no longer concerned with such limits. Hence, when coupled with the general challenges to classical foundationalism as a default setting and also to some strong versions of evidentialism as necessary models for philosophical thought, which are challenges brought about by the rise in meta-epistemological inquiry in the twentieth century, analytic philosophy no longer had reason to reject philosophical theology as non-philosophical according to classical foundationalist criteria.

Recognizing that Wolterstorff, Taylor, Evans, and Westphal all agree that the contemporary philosophical landscape is defined by 'extraordinary epistemological pluralism' (Wolterstorff 2009: 161), why is it that Wolterstorff thinks this pluralism invites receptivity to philosophical theology in analytic philosophy but not in continental philosophy? The answer cannot be that continental philosophers are still wedded to classical foundationalism and strong versions of evidentialism. Indeed, Wolterstorff admits, 'continental philosophers have also, for some time now, been questioning the basic assumptions of classical foundationalism' (Wolterstorff 2009: 160). Instead, Wolterstorff suggests that the continued continental preoccupation with thinking through Kantian limits of the thinkable (which seems largely correct given the widespread appreciation of the importance of this perspective running from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to Gadamer and Derrida) leads many within continental philosophy still to believe that philosophical theology might end up just being ontotheology:

> It is my impression that the philosophers in the continental tradition are still seriously debating the Kant–Heidegger question, whether it is possible for there to be a version of philosophical theology that is not onto-theology .... The analytic philosopher regards that question as decisively settled in the affirmative: yes, such a philosophical theology is possible. It is not only possible but actual.
>
> (Wolterstorff 2009: 168)

Wolterstorff defines ontotheology in Kantian terms, whereas others (e.g. Westphal 2001) define it in more Heideggerian terms. Either way, the key is that ontotheology makes theology answer to philosophical categories and criteria. Specifically, Wolterstorff notes that ontotheology emerges when one thinks that faith is a matter of pure reason and the nature of God is circumscribed by ontology. As Bruce Ellis Benson and I have argued elsewhere, following Westphal, ontotheology is a dual problem because it is *bad philosophy* (it falls prey to the sorts of modernist assumptions that recent meta-epistemology has challenged), and also because it is *bad theology* insofar as it reduces God to nothing more than the 'God of the philosophers' (Simmons and Benson 2013: Ch. 3).

If Wolterstorff is right that continental philosophers are still worried that philosophical theology might *necessarily* be ontotheology, then this would go a long way towards explaining the continental hesitancy to engage in philosophical theology. However, if we appreciate the diversity within continental philosophy, then there is good reason to question Wolterstorff's account on this front. Indeed, in many ways, the Heideggerian articulation of ontotheology seems to make precisely the opposite case. For Heidegger, once we recognize the legitimate problems with ontotheology, we can see that the problem is not with philosophical theology itself, but rather with the idea that theology must answer to philosophy. In some sense, Heidegger is, ironically, one of the greatest defenders of the potential legitimacy of philosophical theology. As Heidegger explains:

> The god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the divine god. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than onto-theo-logic would like to admit.
>
> (Heidegger 1969: 71–2)

Though some scholars read Heidegger as suggesting that the critique of ontotheology entails the rejection of classical theism (see Caputo 2005; 2012), I contend that this is not the case. Heidegger does not claim that God is not self-caused, say, but simply that *if* this philosophical name is taken to be *the highest* or *most appropriate* name for God, then we have likely missed 'the divine God'. We have, instead, settled for a God that is not much more than the conclusion to an argument, rather than seeking the God in whom we 'live, move, and have our being' (Acts 17:28). Accordingly, Westphal is right to claim that the critique of ontotheology is:

> not directed toward the god of the Bible or the Koran, before whom people do fall on their knees in awe, pray, sacrifice, sing, and dance. It is a critique of a metaphysical tradition that extends from Anaximander to Nietzsche and includes Aristotle and Hegel as high points.
>
> (Westphal 2001: 4)

Ultimately, then, if continental philosophy shares with analytic philosophy the critique of classical foundationalism and also understands that philosophical theology does not need to be ontotheological, then it is unclear exactly how far apart the two traditions really are in this respect.

Wolterstorff's ideas about the nature of philosophical inquiry might seem to be a more likely explanation since they concern practice as well as theory. 'It is my impression', Wolterstorff writes, 'that continental philosophers remain very much concerned to preserve and protect the distinctness of philosophy as an academic discipline, a *Wissenschaft*' (Wolterstorff 2009: 168). His suggestion here is initially quite plausible in light of Husserl's account of philosophy as a 'rigorous science' (*strenge Wissenschaft*), Heidegger's suggestion that we need philosophy to lay out a fundamental ontology by which all other 'positive sciences' (including theology) could then be understood, and Levinas's repeated suggestion that the distinction between philosophy and theology was so important that when he engaged in Talmudic writing he intentionally used a different publisher. Further, some critics have even suggested that the recent 'new phenomenology' of Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and Jacques Derrida is no longer phenomenological philosophy, but has become revealed, confessional theology (see Janicaud 2000; for an extended consideration of Janicaud's account, see Simmons and Benson 2013: 74–84). Such a critique seems to assume the very sort of concern to which Wolterstorff refers: philosophy, as a practice, seems to have very specific evidentiary, methodological, and disciplinary limits.

Drawing on the Rawlsian idea of 'public reason', Wolterstorff claims that continental philosophy seems to be committed to 'public philosophical reason' in ways that would prohibit theological discourse due to its seemingly non-public appeals to evidence and authority structures operative only within determinate religious communities (Wolterstorff 2009: 164). In contrast, Wolterstorff understands analytic philosophy to operate according to a 'dialogic pluralism' (Wolterstorff 2009: 166), whereby there are not stipulated, objective, and neutral starting points from which philosophical reflection must begin. As Wolterstorff writes elsewhere, 'What else can one say but to your deepest commitments and convictions be true as you engage in dialogue with your fellow philosophers on philosophical issues?' (Wolterstorff 2011: 265). In other words, in a claim that Heidegger, Ricoeur, or Derrida could have offered, Wolterstorff basically suggests that we should start where we find ourselves. For where else could we begin other than where we are?

Though there is some initial plausibility in Wolterstorff's suggestion that continental philosophy operates according to 'public philosophical reason', there are good reasons to push back against this proposal as well. In the first place, Husserl, Heidegger, and the other thinkers mentioned are all primarily working within the phenomenological tradition and so their articulations of inappropriate border crossings between philosophy and theology are due to their understanding of methodological guidelines operative within phenomenology. The specific distinction between phenomenology and theology is a complicated one and not due to some sort of modernist commitment to objectivity and neutrality in philosophical discourse more broadly. Indeed, nearly all phenomenologists after Husserl have resisted the idea of philosophy as a 'rigorous science', if that means that philosophy should be objective and neutral. Instead, given that not all phenomenologists agree with each other—and that not all continental philosophers are phenomenologists—what results is very much a model of 'dialogic pluralism' within continental philosophy. Realizing that philosophers are always already embodied social beings working within cultural–historical contexts, and in light of the power structures that operate internal to linguistic and conceptual frameworks, continental philosophers should be maximally receptive to the kind of pluralism Wolterstorff advocates.

So although Wolterstorff is in some ways right to claim that continental philosophy has not been the fertile ground for philosophical theology that analytic philosophy has been, we have seen that both of the reasons Wolterstorff gives for this reality face significant challenges. When one considers the robust challenge to modernist epistemology, ontotheology, and philosophical arrogance found within continental philosophy, it might seem that continental philosophy should be a *more likely* place for philosophical theology to find traction than in analytic philosophy. Indeed, much of analytic philosophy continues to elevate science as the primary model for philosophical inquiry and sometimes seems to aim at the sort of objectivity characteristic of the disciplinary arrogance found in some strands of modernism.

It is largely unhelpful to the task of thinking about the prospects for philosophical theology in coming years to spend much time deciding which tradition is the *most* postmodern or the *most* opposed to classical foundationalism, or the *most* radically aware of the hermeneutic realities that attend all inquiry, etc. Rather, it is important for continental *and* analytic philosophers to see *both* traditions as essentially plural and offering different sorts of resources to this important area of inquiry. Ultimately, we would do well to admit that Jean Luc Marion and Linda Zagzebski (both Catholic thinkers) might have much more in common in ways that matter to philosophical theology than do Zagzebski and Paul Draper (who philosophically defends atheism). Sharing a philosophical tradition might be much less important than sharing those 'deep commitments and convictions' to which Wolterstorff refers.

Indeed, Wolterstorff himself notes that there is an important geographical factor that must be attended to as part of the explanation for why philosophical theology has thrived in analytic philosophy in the *United States*: widespread theistic religious identity (Wolterstorff 2009: 162). I think that this is a factor worth taking quite seriously, and we would do well not to miss Wolterstorff's admission that philosophical theology has been less present in other countries that are themselves engaged very deeply in analytic philosophy. This just further stands as reason to resist the notion that *continental* and *analytic* are descriptors that do critical work to aid in philosophical practice concerning this topic.

We should, then, realize that a general continental resistance to philosophical theology does not mean an absolute rejection. There have been many continental philosophers quite receptive to various forms of philosophical theology. To name but a few: Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, John Macquarrie, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Jean Luc Marion, Merold Westphal, Richard Kearney, Bruce Ellis Benson, John Caputo, Gianni Vattimo, and perhaps even (albeit in very different ways from the foregoing), Friedrich Nietzsche, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, and Gilles Deleuze. Even though one might remain sceptical about whether these latter thinkers should be included in the 'theology' camp, I think that they raise important questions about what is at stake in delimiting theology in various ways.

In light of such examples of continental engagement, Wolterstorff's account of the *sort* of philosophical theology largely going on in analytic philosophy is important to consider. He characterizes it as 'Anselmian theology' and describes it as both *positive* and also *personal*:

> Analytic philosophical theology has been almost entirely kataphatic rather than apophatic; negative theology has been no more than a minor strand. Second, and more relevantly, Anselm entered the philosophical dialogue as who he was: believing what he did believe, loving what he did love. He began with a prayer, asking God to grant him what was necessary for the task ahead, that task being to understand *that* God is and *who* God is.
>
> (Wolterstorff 2009: 168, emphasis in original)

Though there are some continental philosophers who affirm some version of what I would term divine personalism (e.g. Westphal, Marion, Benson, and Kearney), many do not; choosing instead to conceive of God as impersonal 'event' (Caputo), 'trace' (Levinas), or 'secret' (Derrida). This impersonalism has continued in more radical ways in the thought of those continental thinkers who advocate a 'new materialism' inspired by Deleuzean ideas about immanence (see Crockett and Robbins 2012). Similarly, though only 'a minor strand' in analytic philosophy, apophaticism has been very prominent within continental philosophy (see Simmons and Benson 2013: 113–31). Indeed, in recent essays, I have been calling for what I term *postmodern kataphaticism* precisely as something of a corrective to the overly apophatic tendencies that characterize much of continental God-talk (see Simmons 2012). Hence, the Anselmian dimensions that Wolterstorff takes to be characteristic of analytic philosophical theology do indeed seem to illuminate important points of difference from many continental accounts. However, what this demonstrates is not that continental philosophy is *essentially* less receptive to philosophical theology, but that the *sort* of philosophical theology that draws heavily upon continental resources is likely to be different from that produced by those drawing heavily upon analytic resources (though not necessarily different).

Let me also note that it might be considered to count in continental philosophy's favour that it has not witnessed an explosion of philosophical theology within its ranks in recent decades. Having been largely ignored by analytic philosophers working in such areas, continental philosophy is something of an untrammelled field such that the pathways one should travel are not yet clearly marked. Although there is much important work yet to be done in analytic philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, in many ways the paths have become worn and so the options for where to go are to some degree prescribed by where others have already gone. Alternatively, the book on how continental philosophical theology can enter these debates is in many ways still unwritten. Even though this can suggest that there may not be much of a book there to write, as some of the proponents of 'analytic theology' seem occasionally to suggest, I take it, rather, as a call for constructive work. Turning to continental philosophy as a resource for philosophical theology, and in particular for the epistemology of theology, should be viewed as an important way of keeping lovers of inquiry open to wherever 'the beloved might lead', as Socrates would say, rather than assuming that the beloved must surely continue to travel these previous and clearly marked paths.

## Possible Continental Contributions to the Epistemology of Theology

Let us turn now to some positive areas in the epistemology of theology where continental philosophy offers critical resources for productive inquiry.

### Foundationalism, Experience, and Revelation

Despite the deep and persistent critique of classical foundationalism in both analytic and continental philosophy, it is not the case that foundationalism, as such, is no longer a viable epistemological theory. Many prominent analytic philosophers have suggested that the notion of non-inferential 'basic' beliefs being the 'foundational' support for other non-basic beliefs is the right way to understand both justification and also the structure of reasoning. For example, William Alston's (1989) 'minimal foundationalism', Robert Audi's (2001) 'modest foundationalism', Nicholas Rescher's (2003) 'fallibilist foundationalism', and Scott F. Aikin's (2005) 'weak foundationalism' all maintain the foundationalist structure while rejecting the certainty found in classical formulations. It is also the case that even much of the Reformed epistemology defended by Wolterstorff and Plantinga still operates according to the basic/non-basic foundational architecture. This is an important realization because many continental philosophers can rightly be viewed as offering comparable versions of modest foundationalism. I have argued elsewhere that new phenomenologists frequently deploy such accounts (albeit implicitly) in ways that might be of relevance to mainstream debates in religious epistemology. Proposing an idea that I term 'deconstructive foundationalism', which combines aspects of modest foundationalism and epistemic infinitism, I suggest that the key notions of justice (Derrida), the other (Levinas), life (Henry), the call (Chrétien), and the gift (Marion) are all rightly understood as employing a modest foundational framework (see Simmons and Aikin 2009; Simmons 2011: Ch. 11; and Simmons and Aikin 2012).

Importantly for the epistemology of theology, all of these ideas are embedded in the phenomenological attempt to make sense of the givenness of that which overflows or stands in excess of intentionality. In this way, these thinkers are helpful for the critical work needed to make sense of what 'religious experience' could possibly mean as concerns the object of one's experience. That is, how is experience of that which does not 'appear' in any straightforward sense even possible? Similarly, phenomenology has entertained a long-standing debate about Heidegger's distinction between revelation (*Offenbarung*) and revealability (*Offenbarkeit*) (see Derrida et al. 2005). Must that which is revealed be revealed according to some sort of conceptual/ontological standard (the phenomenological term for this is 'horizon')? Or, can revelation in some cases occur without such preconditions (horizons)? New phenomenologists are not agreed on the best answer to this difficult question.

In this way, new phenomenology is a critical interlocutor for debates concerning the possibility of religious revelation. Here I take it that new phenomenology is especially relevant given the important work emerging concerning this issue at the intersection of philosophical theology and cognitive science (for an account of how phenomenology and cognitive science are resources for each other, see Gallagher and Zahavi 2012). Although phenomenologists, *as phenomenologists*, will likely stop short (for methodological and evidentiary reasons) of affirming the *actuality* of such theological revelation, getting clear on the conditions for its *possibility* is a crucial task in the epistemology of theology.

## Realism and Anti-Realism

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood aspects of continental philosophy concerns its supposed anti-realism. Although there is certainly a deep strand of Kantian (epistemological) anti-realism that does stand as something of a backdrop to much of continental philosophy, the metaphysical/ontological implications that are drawn from such anti-realism are varied indeed. That one inescapably occupies a particular perspective on reality and, as such, claims to see 'the truth as God sees it' are problematic does not mean that there is no 'truth as God sees it' (here I am drawing this terminology from Rea's introduction in Crisp and Rea: 2009: 1–30). In other words, epistemological humility does not entail scepticism about metaphysical truth. Kierkegaard understood this well and repeatedly noted that even if God can systematically know reality and existence, this is likely not the case for an existing individual (Kierkegaard 1992). Though perhaps resisting the idea that there is truth as God sees it, Nietzsche's perspectivalism, Husserl's theory of adumbrated perceptions, and theories of embodiment offered by Merleau-Ponty, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, and Elizabeth Grosz are all other examples of this basic Kierkegaardian insight regarding epistemological humility.

So, how might various versions of metaphysical realism still be found in continental philosophy despite the general epistemological anti-realism? There are many places one might look. Moving along something of a spectrum, we might point to those theories advocating the reality of the 'virtual' (especially Deleuze, but in different ways Žižek). Additionally, some working in the area of critical theory offer accounts that are similar in many ways to the 'critical realism' of Roy Bhaskar. Others, inspired by the work of thinkers such as Alain Badiou (e.g. Graham Harmon and Quentin Meillassoux) have suggested the idea of 'speculative realism', which is deeply critical of post-Kantian notions of correlationism (see Meillassoux 2008; Harmon 2010). When it comes to theology in particular, though, it is worth mentioning that many continental philosophers from Kierkegaard to Marion defend views of metaphysical realism that are quite close to that advocated by 'Christian philosophers' working within analytic frameworks. The difference is that the epistemic upshots of the appreciation of embodied, socio-historical existence often get cashed out differently in these continental approaches—thus underlying, I believe, the generally apophatic tendencies in much of continental philosophy.

Ultimately, these various continental accounts offer a way of thinking about realism that resists the realism/anti-realism split as hard and fast. For example, appreciating the difference between epistemological and metaphysical realism/anti-realism opens important space for cultivating hermeneutic humility while still allowing for determinate truth claims. Moreover, recognizing that there are many forms of realism invites a more robust discussion regarding the very stakes of what constitutes what we call 'religion'.

## Conclusion

Undoubtedly many other areas of possible continental contributions to the epistemology of theology could be offered. For example, the genealogical accounts of Foucault and Nietzsche, along with the ideas of 'historicity' in Heidegger, and Jean-Luc Nancy's (2008) conceptions of community identity should be appreciated as recourses for thinking about the role of tradition in religious existence. Similarly, Levinas's (1996) account of the 'truth of testimony' and Kelly Oliver's (2001) account of 'bearing witness' can provide helpful ways of making sense of the alternative epistemic approaches that might be operative in theological discourse. Further, as James K. A. Smith (2010) has rightly noted, philosophers of religion interested in Pentecostalism will find important resources in continental philosophy (especially within deconstructionism) for thinking about narrative truth. Moreover, the very idea of 'Christian philosophy' is something that continental thinkers have considered in some detail, often reaching different conclusions than many within analytic circles (see Simmons and Benson 2013: Ch. 6). Finally, specific religious phenomena, for example Chrétien's (2000) analysis of prayer, have received close attention from some within continental philosophy, and such engagements should be seen as fodder for further philosophical and theological work.

Hopefully this chapter will encourage philosophers to challenge the idea that 'continental philosophy' should be located as simply a contemporary movement (in the singular) that may or may not have critical potential for epistemology, theology, and philosophy of religion. Instead, more philosophers should begin drawing on whatever resources are of value in their thinking, rather than artificially limiting the resources upon which one can draw by circumscribing a discourse as 'analytic' or 'continental'. By locating 'continental philosophy' as its own chapter in the present volume, for example, it seems as if those other topics would (naturally) be considered from a non-continental perspective. As I have argued elsewhere, what I think is needed is 'mashup philosophy of religion' in which the distinctive aspects of various philosophical traditions are plausibly maintained while being constructively appropriated in work that no longer recognizes the differences between such traditions as hard and fast (Simmons 2014). Ultimately, what is needed, I believe, is the overcoming of calls to overcome the analytic/continental divide. Such an overcoming would, hopefully, simply look like serious philosophical work that no longer recognizes an analytic/continental divide in the first place as something that should deeply affect one's self-understanding as a philosopher.

Ultimately, then, in light of mashup philosophy of religion, *the* epistemology of theology should be understood as *epistemologies* of *theologies*. Similarly, *continental* approaches to such epistemologies of theologies should simply be viewed as *philosophical* accounts worth taking seriously.

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## CHAPTER 39

# MODERN ORTHODOX THINKERS

PAUL L. GAVRILYUK

Throughout its two-thousand-year history, Orthodox theology has been dominated by metaphysical and soteriological, rather than epistemological, issues. The questions 'who is the Christian God?' and 'how is salvation attained?' have always had priority over the question 'how do we know that we know God?' Although premodern Eastern Christian authors did not develop fully fledged theories of knowledge, a careful reading of their works yields valuable epistemological insights. Consequently, while there is general agreement on the substance of Trinitarian metaphysics, no epistemological theory has ever received a broad-ranging ecclesial endorsement in the East (see Abraham 1998).

Over the last two hundred years, thinkers rooted in the Orthodox tradition have offered different responses to the Western epistemological proposals and anticipated some important developments in contemporary epistemology. The introductory section of this chapter identifies general traits that characterize an Eastern Christian approach to the knowledge of God. The remaining sections discuss the contributions of the following nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors: Aleksei Khomiakov (1804–1860), Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900), Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944), Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948), Georges Florovsky (1893–1979), Vladimir Lossky (1903–58) and John Zizioulas (b. 1931). This list includes not only theologians of unquestionable orthodoxy but also religious philosophers, such as Solovyov and Berdyaev, whose affiliation with the Orthodox tradition is more complex. The contributions of the major Russian religious philosophers have been included here because they have significantly shaped the modern Orthodox tradition, even if their ideas have at times tested the boundaries of orthodoxy.

## GENERAL FEATURES OF THE MODERN ORTHODOX EPISTEMOLOGY OF THEOLOGY

The epistemological proposals of modern Orthodox thinkers draw on the resources of the patristic tradition as well as respond to the Western philosophical challenges. Some authors, such as Florovsky and Lossky, focused more fully on engaging the patristic sources than on meeting the Western challenges; other authors, such as Solovyov and Berdyaev, concentrated most of their attention on addressing Western challenges and drew less on the patristic tradition. As a rule, these interactions focused on metaphysics, ethics, and cognitive theories, while religious epistemology remained a comparatively minor concern.

Orthodox thinkers only started to engage modern Western epistemological theories in a philosophically rigorous manner relatively late, in the nineteenth century. The most important work in this arena came out of Russia, due to the intellectual isolation that other traditionally Orthodox nations continued to experience under Ottoman rule. In the nineteenth century, the most original contributions to religious epistemology were made by relatively few figures, such as Khomiakov and Solovyov. Early in the twentieth century, Russia experienced an unprecedented flourishing of religious philosophy, which has been described as the 'religious-philosophical renaissance' (Zernov 1963).

The main impulse of the Russian religious renaissance was the Christianization of all aspects of culture, including economics, politics, arts, literature, and philosophy. In philosophy, the predominant interest was in metaphysical, social, and economic questions, rather than epistemology. The priority of metaphysics over epistemology was self-consciously upheld in response to the German idealist tradition's prioritization of the subject over being and to the positivist attack on metaphysics. The move to prioritize metaphysical questions in Russian religious-philosophical thought was in continuity with the patristic tradition and in response to the Western subordination of ontology to epistemology. Hence, the first general characteristic of Russian religious thought is its 'ontologism'; its conviction that while being and knowing are entangled, the real cannot be subordinated to the content of the states of consciousness (Gavrilyuk 2014). Broadly speaking, ontologism follows the logic of patristic thought, rather than the Cartesian turn to the subject in modern Western philosophies.

The second general characteristic of Orthodox religious epistemology is its acknowledgement of the profound mystery of God, a recognition that the creaturely knowledge of God is severely limited. In response to Hegelian rationalism, which effectively reduces the real to what can be rationally comprehended, Russian religious thinkers, following patristic apophaticism, emphasized in different ways the incomprehensibility of God, for reasons to do with creaturely limitations, the cognitive consequences of human sinfulness, as well as the data of religious experience. In light of this preference for apophasis, there is a tendency in Russian religious philosophy to privilege non-propositional and intuitive knowledge of God over the propositional and discursive forms of knowledge. Non-propositional knowledge is a form of direct awareness of God, rather than a matter of reasoning about God. This is commonly accompanied by recognition that by pondering the mystery of God and the mystery of divine involvement in the world, human reason often encounters paradoxes. For example, Pavel Florensky in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* applied the Kantian category of 'antinomy' to such theological categories as the Trinity and unity of God, time and eternity, free will and divine providence, and so on (Florensky 1997). In a different mode, Semen Frank developed an epistemology in which the apprehension of any object depended as the condition of its possibility on the unknown, which served as a dynamic boundary of the cognitive process. According to Frank, each cognitive act is the transformation of the darkness of the unknown into the light of the known (Frank 1990).

The third general characteristic of Orthodox religious thought is its preference for a more synthetic and holistic approach to epistemology than that commonly found in Western epistemologies. For example, there is a resistance to the Kantian separation of cognizing reason from will and emotion. Following Khomiakov and Solovyov, Russian religious philosophers speak of 'integral' knowledge, which is obtained by the whole person in the concrete circumstances of life. For Khomiakov, such knowledge involved an integration of knowledge based on everyday experience with the knowledge obtained using rigorous method. For Solovyov, such knowledge involved a synthesis of empirical, rational, and mystical forms of knowledge.

The fourth and final characteristic of Orthodox religious epistemology is its social and ecclesiological character. Beginning with Khomiakov, the attainment of knowledge is seen as inseparable from a community of knowers. There is also an insistence on the ecclesial and sacramental transformation of the knower by the reality that is being known. In other words, there is no divine gnosis without striving for theosis.

## Aleksei Khomiakov

Khomiakov was a nineteenth-century Russian lay theologian and one of the leaders of the Slavophile movement. He was not a trained philosopher and did not write essays on religious epistemology, but left a number of profound epistemological insights scattered throughout his writings, such as his *Letter to Yury Samarin on the Contemporary Philosophical Currents* and *Concerning the Fragments Found in I. V. Kireevsky's Papers*.

As a student of German idealism, Khomiakov criticized Hegelian rationalism for representing the acquisition of knowledge in terms of a logical development of a concept, abstracted from life. Russian theologians insisted that knowing involved the whole person and could not be separated from other human activities, such as moral decision-making and social interaction (Berdyaev 2005). According to Khomiakov, 'individual thinking can be powerful and productive only when the highest knowledge, and people who express it, are bound up with the rest of the social organism by the bonds of free and rational love' (Khomiakov 1861: 174). He saw the Russian Orthodox peasant commune

(Russian: *mir* or *narod*) as an exemplary case of such a social organism. Khomiakov's central insight—that the process of acquiring knowledge involves a harmoniously functioning community of knowers, rather than an autonomously operating solitary mind—was about a century ahead of its time, anticipating important developments in contemporary social epistemology, such as the concept of 'proper function' and the emphasis on the importance of the community of knowers, rather than personal autonomy, in knowledge acquisition.

Khomiakov is primarily known to Western readers for his elaboration of his concept of *sobornost'* or catholicity, which has a direct bearing upon his religious epistemology. According to Khomiakov, the third mark of the Church, her catholicity, was more than universality. Rather, catholicity uniquely reflected 'unity in plurality', the free unity of mind and spirit that was established between the believers in ecclesial communion (Khomiakov 1995: 279). Building on the work of Ivan Kireevsky, Khomiakov held that:

> [T]he understanding of truth is based on the communion of love and is impossible without such a communion. Inaccessible to an individual mind, the truth is accessible to the community of minds, bounded by love. This feature sharply distinguishes the Orthodox teaching from all others: from Latinity, built on external authority, and from Protestantism, which leaves the individual freedom in the desert of abstract intellectualism.
>
> (Khomiakov 1861: 283)

Consequently, 'the rationality (Russian: *razumnost'*) of the Church is the highest form of human rationality' (Khomiakov 1861: 283). Khomiakov's religious epistemology of catholicity was a special case of social epistemology developed in the context of Orthodox ecclesiology, which was in large measure an idealization of the historical realities of the Orthodox Church. The ecclesiological dimension of epistemology was taken up in the works of Berdyaev, Florovsky, and Zizioulas. Solovyov further developed Khomiakov's critique of abstract reasoning.

## VLADIMIR SOLOVYOV

Solovyov was a nineteenth-century poet, mystic, religious philosopher, prominent public intellectual and possibly the most significant inspiration of the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance. His considerable corpus includes treatises on ethics, metaphysics, church history, dogmatics, aesthetics, and theories of knowledge. Epistemology dominated his attention in the beginning of his philosophical career in his master's thesis *The Crisis of Western Philosophy: Against the Positivists* (1874), defended when the philosopher was only twenty-one, in his unfinished work *The Philosophical Foundations of Integral Knowledge* (1877), and in his doctoral dissertation, *The Critique of Abstract Principles* (1880). In *The Crisis of Western Philosophy*, Solovyov represents the development of premodern Western intellectual tradition as a gradual emancipation of reason from the external authority of revelation. In the idealist tradition, this trend was followed by extending the powers of reason over extra-mental reality. In response to Kant's separation of the knowing subject from objective reality, Solovyov sought an epistemology that would reconnect the knower with the real.

In *The Philosophical Foundations of Integral Knowledge*, Solovyov proposed an epistemology that connected natural science, philosophy, and theology. These three knowledge domains were undifferentiated in most archaic cultures, but became increasingly isolated from each other in modernity. The reunification of these knowledge domains entailed an integration of empirical, rational, and mystical forms of knowledge, which would lead to what he called 'integral' knowledge. Solovyov developed Friedrich Jacobi's insight that the act of faith underlay every cognitive act inasmuch as it established a pre-rational, intuitive grasp of reality. As such, religious knowledge grounds empirical and rational knowledge. Corresponding to the idea of integral knowledge was Solovyov's conviction that the highest truth is to be found in the unified totality of all reality, the 'existent all-unity', the knowledge of which was a matter of mystical illumination rather than everyday experience. As an idealist, Solovyov also held that the acquisition of knowledge must be accompanied by the will's alignment with the good and the taste's alignment with the beautiful. His project of the reintegration of knowledge on a religious foundation has much to offer to the present-day discussion of interdisciplinary learning and the nature of the university liberal arts curriculum.

## SERGIUS BULGAKOV

Bulgakov is the author of the most comprehensive system of Orthodox theology since John of Damascus in the eighth century. Bulgakov's religious epistemology is presented in his *Philosophy of the Name*, published posthumously in 1953. The writing of this book was provoked by a controversy around the practice and theology of Jesus Prayer ('Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner' and its variations). Russian Hesychasts, dedicated to the practice of Jesus Prayer, defended a controversial claim that the invocation of the divine name puts one uniquely in the presence of God. In *The Philosophy of the Name*, Bulgakov develops an epistemology closely tied to a theory of language and Trinitarian theology. According to Bulgakov, 'there are no thoughts without words, just as there are no words without meaning. One cannot detach the meaning from the word or the word from the thought just as one cannot separate oneself from one's shadow' (Bulgakov 1999: 26). Bulgakov is sceptical about the historical, psychological, and evolutionary explanations of the formation of language, since those explanations do not provide an account of how the symbolic and physical aspects of the word came to be fused with its mental aspect. He maintains that the Kantian problem of how one can mentally apprehend non-mental entities (i.e. Kant's claim that only appearances conditioned by the structure of human conscience, rather than the 'things-in-themselves', are knowable) can be resolved by taking notice of the dual (mental and non-mental) nature of the words that comprise thoughts.

Bulgakov interprets John 1:1 and 3 'in the beginning was the Word' and 'all things came to being through [the Word]' as implying that created things were brought into being by the divine Logos by means of thought-words (Bulgakov 1999: 188). The Russian philosopher argues against Kant that reality is cognitively accessible precisely because in creation words, thoughts, and reality comprise one whole. The words (as mental symbols) secure the reference to the non-mental things because of this original correlation. To clarify, the fact that thoughts could be expressed in words is the condition of the possibility of mentally grasping non-mental reality, since the tools that are used for such grasping—words that are arranged into sentences—have irreducible and inseparable mental and non-mental aspects. It follows that a cognitive act is 'a voice of the world in human consciousness' because the world is shot through with creative thought-words of God (Bulgakov 1999: 201). The words that participate in both the mental and physical aspects of reality connect cognition with being. For Bulgakov, the dual nature of language makes epistemological realism (in contrast to the anti-realist epistemologies of German idealism) possible. The application of the Christian doctrine of creation to a theory of language is the most original aspect of Bulgakov's epistemology.

In *The Unfading Light* (1917), Bulgakov defended the possibility and accessibility of religious experience against epistemological challenges of a Kantian, Neo-Kantian, and positivist sort. Religious experience is possible because humans possess a special spiritual organ, 'a noetic eye', through which God makes himself accessible (Bulgakov 1994: 12). Bulgakov gestures in the direction of the idea of spiritual perception, which makes possible seeing 'God in the world and the world in God' (Bulgakov 1994: 25). The sense of the presence of God in the world permeates all of Bulgakov's works, especially his metaphysical speculations on Godmanhood. Bulgakov's longtime friend, Nikolai Berdyaev, also defended the epistemic parity of religious experience with other forms of experience.

## NIKOLAI BERDYAEV

Berdyaev characterized himself as a free religious philosopher, steeped in the Orthodox faith, but rejecting any external dogmatic constraints. He was, according to his own description, a philosopher of spiritual freedom and a rebel against any dogmatic totalitarianism, whether of Christian or Marxist making. Berdyaev's philosophy could be broadly described as Christian personalism and existentialism. His aphoristic method of expression favours intuitivism at the expense of a more discursive presentation of philosophical ideas. A prominent public intellectual, Berdyaev wrote on social philosophy, theological anthropology, ethics, and epistemology. His central preoccupation was the Christian understanding of the human person; his treatment of epistemological problems was a prominent aspect of his personalism. Two works are especially relevant for understanding Berdyaev's religious epistemology: his early work *The Philosophy of Freedom* (1911) and one of his last writings, found in his archive after his death, *Truth and Revelation* (written in 1946–7, first published in Russian in 1996).

The first part of *The Philosophy of Freedom* is dedicated to the analysis of Western cognitive theories in the spirit of Solovyov's *Critique of Abstract Principles*. According to Berdyaev, the development of Western philosophy, especially Kant and his followers, shows a growing divide between the knower and the reality known. Berdyaev rejects any epistemology that imposes external rationalistic criteria upon experience and life as it is actually lived. Following Solovyov, Berdyaev insists that cognitive acts do not belong to an abstraction called 'reason', but rather to an 'integral spirit', to a total human being for whom knowing is a part of a range of activities, including practical decisions and creative acts. Berdyaev is also close to Solovyov in insisting that the desired integration cannot be achieved without properly accounting for the religious dimension of human existence.

For Berdyaev, empiricism contains some partial truth in prioritizing experience over abstract mental functions. However, according to the Russian philosopher, the empiricist tradition has unjustifiably limited the scope of possible experience by excluding miraculous and mystical phenomena. Berdyaev rejects any theory of knowledge that imposes artificial constraints on the scope of experience and fails to do justice to the realities of life, including religious life. He calls for a return to a philosophy that is informed not only by natural sciences, but also by religion, especially as it is lived out in real life. He writes: 'Truth cannot be purely a matter of cognition; truth is also a matter of life and is inseparable from the fullness of life' (Berdyaev 1996: 37). More concretely, truth seeking cannot be separated from other human activities such as religious practices or morally significant actions.

Unlike Solovyov, Berdyaev was sceptical about the viability of a universal epistemology, and favoured domain-specific epistemologies instead. Berdyaev acknowledged a crisis of scientism (a view that natural sciences are able to resolve all philosophical questions) and positivism at the beginning of the twentieth century. While empiricism and rationalism might serve the purpose of natural sciences more or less adequately, it is misleading to apply the limiting assumptions of these philosophies to religious phenomena. Berdyaev was resistant to the attempts to fit religion within the 'limits of reason alone', and insisted on the supra-rational and experiential character of Christian beliefs. He emphasized that the central Christian beliefs, such as the Trinity and Incarnation, were primarily the products of revelation and experience, rather than rational speculation.

According to Berdyaev, the apprehension of spiritual realities by faith is somewhat different from the perception of physical realities. While the experience of spiritual realities can be overwhelming, there is a greater degree of freedom in the apprehension of spiritual realities by faith. Physical objects, on the contrary, trigger conscious beliefs with a greater degree of external compulsion.

Berdyaev believed that a return of contemporary epistemology to being is possible only as a return to the deepest insights of the Christian theological tradition. He did not see tradition as an external authority arbitrarily imposing itself upon 'autonomous reason'. On the contrary, tradition is a matter of 'broadening individual experience and internalizing past spiritual accomplishments' (Berdyaev 1996: 39). Christian theology postulates a correspondence between the divine Logos and the logoi of creation. This correspondence provides a foundation for an epistemological stance in which an act of knowing is understood as an act of participation in being, rather than an act of mirroring, duplicating, or constructing reality. On this view, truth is not merely objectively given, but is at once creatively achieved. In other words, Berdyaev emphasized that the quest for truth is an intentional and creative activity that transforms the knower.

The attainment of the highest truth, which is God and the knowledge of God, is for Berdyaev an aristocratic endeavour. Berdyaev's use of the term 'aristocratic' may be misinterpreted as an elitist move. But his intention was to point out that the difficult sayings of the gospel and the deepest insights of the mystics lost much of their original power once they were offered for popular consumption. At the same time, Berdyaev was far from advocating spiritual individualism in religious epistemology. In fact, Berdyaev was possibly the first to appreciate the importance of Khomiakov's insights in social epistemology. According to Berdyaev, the revelation of the divine Logos is most fully accessible to the 'ecclesial consciousness' consisting of a harmoniously functioning community of knowers, rather than to individual persons. This point was also taken up in the religious epistemology of Georges Florovsky.

## Georges Florovsky

Florovsky is commonly regarded as the mastermind of a 'return to the Church Fathers' in Eastern Orthodox theology. In addition to being a patristic scholar, he was also a historian of Russian religious thought, an ecumenist, and a theologian in his own right. His approach to the epistemology of theology is closely tied to his ecclesiology. Theological enquiry must involve the transformation of a theologian's mind by an ever-deepening incorporation into the life of the church. The aim of this incorporation is to reach the fullness of communion with the church as the Body of Christ, thereby accomplishing 'the catholic transfiguration of personality' (Florovsky 1972: 43). Incorporation into the church provides access to the main sources of revealed truth and prepares the mind to receive these sources in a catholic manner. Without the 'catholic transfiguration of personality' one might quote the church fathers as external authorities, but fail to enter the mind of the fathers. Put differently, a theologian's mind must be transformed by the reality to which the patristic authors bear witness. Since the church fathers have attained the 'catholic fullness' of the faith, they serve not only as pastoral guides, but also as epistemic exemplars (Florovsky 1972: 44). One might describe Florovsky's admittedly fragmentary reflections as an ecclesial epistemology of catholic transformation, which developed Khomiakov's social epistemology.

By relying on Khomiakov, Florovsky went to the source of Solovyov's theory of integral knowledge, accepting Solovyov's conception of faith and his critique of the Western 'abstract principles', but rejecting the philosopher's reliance on Western mystics such as Jacob Boehme. Florovsky was not only familiar with Khomiakov's writings directly, but also closely studied the philosophy of Sergei Trubetskoy, who had developed Khomiakov's epistemology of catholicity (Trubetskoy 1994). Florovsky's account of catholic transformation was also anticipated by Florensky's epistemological explorations, which accorded a central role to conversion in the acquisition of the knowledge of God.

In terms of contemporary analytic philosophy, Florovsky's theological epistemology can be classified as a species of reliabilism. According to reliabilism, a true belief is knowledge if it is certain and obtained by a reliable process (Goldman 2012). For Florovsky, religious beliefs are certain because they are grounded in collective ecclesial experience. In this respect, religious beliefs are akin to perceptual beliefs, since they are obtained in a process of vision-like apprehension. The reliability of religious belief is secured by the knower's ecclesial incorporation. Unlike most non-religious forms of philosophical reliabilism, Florovsky's proposal requires a catholic transformation of the theologian's mind, a process of conforming personal judgement to the mind of the fathers, to the mind of the church, and ultimately, to the mind of Christ. Florovsky stressed ascetic effort, repentance, the renunciation of the self, and the cultivation of discernment as means of attaining the desired catholic transformation. In his study of the patristic sources, Florovsky emphasized the role of 'sympathetic imagination', rather than merely quoting the ancient texts as external authorities (Florovsky 2000; Gavrilyuk 2014).

## Vladimir Lossky

The neopatristic revival of twentieth-century Orthodox theology found one of its most influential protagonists in Vladimir Lossky. The two main foci of Lossky's neopatristic theology are the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Gregory Palamas. In his early articles on Dionysius and in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (French original 1944, first English edition 1957), Lossky maintained that the full implications of the negative theology of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* have not been sufficiently appreciated by Western theologians. In the West, *via negativa* is commonly reduced to a relatively modest claim that positive descriptions of God do not apply to God in the same way that they apply to creatures. God possesses his characteristics in a pre-eminent and uniquely divine manner.

Lossky was not satisfied with a reduction of apophatic theology to an amendment of cataphatic theology. He held instead that for Dionysius, and the Byzantine theological tradition that followed him, apophatic theology was more than a theory of language. Apophatic theology is a way of describing religious experience in which God is revealed as incomprehensible. According to Lossky, in the Dionysian tradition apophatic theology is a spiritual discipline, the purpose of which is to purify the mind of all conceptual idols of God. The language of negative theology points to the highest form of the knowledge of God, attainable in the mystical union. Mystical knowledge is different from propositional knowledge, since it presupposes a transformation of the human self as it is taken up into the life of God. Following Dionysius and other church fathers, Lossky insists that true knowledge of God presupposes a union with God and as such implies participation in God and deification. Lossky's emphasis on the transformative character of religious knowledge has been extremely influential among contemporary Orthodox theologians and their Western followers.

Equally important for Lossky was the heritage of Gregory Palamas, which was rediscovered in twentieth-century Orthodox theology. According to Lossky, the radical apophaticism of Dionysius required a sharp ontological distinction between the inaccessible essence of God and the accessible divine energies. While some earlier patristic authorities implicitly operated with this distinction, Palamas and the Hesychast tradition achieved its mature doctrinal elaboration. The essence/energies distinction allowed for a consistently balanced account of the divine presence in creation through energies and divine transcendence by virtue of God's unknowable and indescribable essence.

## John Zizioulas

Zizioulas is a metropolitan of Pergamon and an eminent Greek Orthodox theologian. He was Florovsky's student at Harvard Divinity School and was also influenced by the eucharistic ecclesiology of Nicholas Afanasiev. Zizioulas deals with issues of theological epistemology in an essay 'Truth and Communion', included as a chapter in the collection *Being as Communion* (1985) and in a section of his *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics* (2008). According to Zizioulas, an ordinary object is known when it is successfully identified, distinguished from other objects, and described in spatio-temporal terms. Since God is not an ordinary object, but the creator of the world, God cannot be known in this way. According to the biblical and patristic teaching, God, who is not ordinarily accessible to sense perception or reason, can be known by the human heart. Zizioulas takes the heart not merely in the restricted sense of a 'seat of emotions' but in a more expansive biblical sense of the volitional, emotional, and cognitive centre of human personality.

Zizioulas sharply distinguishes the knowledge of objects from the knowledge of persons, whose uniqueness is disclosed in communion. Persons, unlike objects, become known within a free relationship of love. God, whose presence is spiritual, does not compel anyone to believe in Him or to know Him. In the Trinity, the Son uniquely discloses the Father. To know God is to be drawn into the relationship of love between the persons of the Trinity; it is to enter into the mystery of the Father's eternal love for the divine Son in the Holy Spirit. The one who knows God realizes that the cause of all existence is not an impersonal substance, but rather the eternal loving communion of the divine persons. Zizioulas proposes a shift from the 'Greek ontology' of substance to the Christian ontology of persons in communion. He lifts out the words of Christ in John's Gospel, 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (Jn. 14:6) as supporting his personalist approach to theological epistemology. Christ is a unique disclosure of truth and life in personal communion.

The Greek theologian holds that personal knowledge of this sort is bound to affect and transform the human knower. To know God in a personal way is to allow oneself be changed by God, to reorder and purify all relationships into which one enters with human persons. Some aspects of Zizioulas's thought echo the distinction between propositional and personal knowledge in analytic theology (compare also Bertrand Russell's knowledge by distinction/knowledge by acquaintance) as well as a strong influence of personalism, associated with thinkers as diverse as Berdyaev and Martin Buber.

For Zizioulas, the knowledge of God also has closely related ecclesiological and sacramental dimensions. The knowledge of God comes by incorporation into a community of believers, the church. This community establishes a new pattern of relationship through which a new member's identity is reconstituted. The entrance into the church lies through a baptismal re-direction of the believer's life and the shedding of previous social and biological identities. The believer finds herself 'in Christ' and is accepted as a child of God, with the result that her new identity defines her relationship to other believers and to God.

According to Zizioulas, God comes to be known most fully and profoundly in the experience of Eucharistic communion. Since the Eucharist reveals Christ as truth and life:

> [T]he Church has therefore no other reality or experience of truth as communion so perfect as the eucharist. … And it is most important to note that in this way of understanding Christ as truth, Christ Himself becomes revealed as truth not *in* a community, but *as* a community. So truth is not just something 'expressed' or 'heard', a propositional or a logical truth; but something which *is*, i.e. an ontological truth: the community itself becoming the truth.
>
> (Zizioulas 1985: 115, emphasis in original)

Zizioulas clarifies: 'Academic theology may concern itself with doctrine, but it is the communion of the Church which makes theology into truth' (Zizioulas 1985: 118). This observation chimes well with the Orthodox conviction that the validation of conciliar doctrines comes through their reception by the church as a whole. Along with Khomiakov, Berdyaev, and Florovsky, Zizioulas is a major contributor to what could be called Orthodox social or ecclesial epistemology.

## Conclusion

The four general features of Orthodox epistemology highlighted in this essay—ontologism, apophaticism, holism, and theosis—captured the central insights of the patristic tradition. Ontologism entails epistemological realism; apophaticism epistemological humility and awareness of human limitations; holism the emphasis on integration of the self; and theosis the insistence on the need for transformation and incorporation into the life of God and the church. The preceding discussion has shown that the primary modern conversation partners of Eastern Orthodox thinkers have been the continental philosophers, especially German idealists (Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Neo-Kantians, and so on). It is underappreciated in Western scholarship that the 'theological turn' in Russian philosophy significantly predates similar developments in French phenomenology and in Anglo-American analytic philosophy. A little-explored ground for the interaction with the analytic tradition is provided by the commitment of Orthodox theology to epistemological realism. There are also promising points of contact between Russian religious epistemology and reliabilist, virtue, and social epistemologies. More specifically, as I have suggested in this chapter, Florovsky's emphasis on the importance of ecclesial incorporation in the process of acquiring religious knowledge has points of contact with contemporary reliabilism, as developed by William Alston (1991). Virtue and social epistemologists have already discovered rich resources in Orthodox ascetic theology, especially in the *Philokalia* (see Aquino 2012). It should be emphasized that the interaction of contemporary philosophers of religion with the Orthodox tradition has only recently started and much remains to be done. Orthodox religious epistemology remains a largely uncharted territory, which warrants book-length treatment. An especially promising area is the intersection of epistemology, theological anthropology, and ecclesiology. A more expansive survey could include the contributions of Sergei Trubetskoy, Vladimir Ern, Gustav Shpet, Ivan Il'in, Lev Shestov, Vasily Zenkovsky, Aleksei Losev, Nikolai Lossky, and Dumitru Staniloae, noted in the suggested reading.

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## CHAPTER 40

# THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY

HARRIET A. HARRIS

Feminist theologians and philosophers of religion disagree widely amongst themselves over epistemology. In this chapter we canvass their diversity and take up the question at the heart of their disagreements: whether vigilant subjectivity and epistemological objectivity can come together, given that the former upholds our diversity and the latter abstracts from it. The aesthetic philosophy of Schiller is called upon to argue that we cannot be truthful nor realize our humanity unless our sensory and formal impulses are brought together, and that their coming together is necessarily paradoxical and playful. Paradox is not always or adequately embraced within feminist theology, so we ask what epistemological lessons may be learned by attending to paradox.

## Feminisms and their Epistemological Options

Feminism is often said to have three or four waves depending on how and why it is being typologized. Women of colour from around the world are circumspect about feminist typologies, because in practice academic feminisms are dominated by white Western women (see Isasi-Díaz 1996: 60–1; Piu-Lan 2002). Through their liberationist work, however, women of colour co-create modes of feminism. For our purposes, we will think of four modes: 'liberal', 'experience', 'women's-voice', and 'poststructuralist' feminism.

## Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism is rooted in liberal political philosophy, and presumes a basic sameness between men and women as grounds for promoting full social and political equality. Liberal feminists attribute detected male–female differences to psycho-social causes. They regard knowledge production as 'a social practice, engaged in by embodied, gendered, historically, racially, and culturally located knowers', such that knowledge claims 'cannot fail to bear the marks of their makers' (Code 1992: 141), but they do not regard truth as socially conditioned.

Liberal political philosophy grew in the era of Enlightenment when Western philosophers, inspired by Newton's physics, analysed the mind like an atomic structure. They viewed cognition as a process of cause and effect between discrete mental particles; impressions gathering into ideas, and forming into beliefs and so on. They did not have so strong a bifurcation between the passions and reason, social effect and individualized thought as twentieth-century critics came to suggest (Coakley 2012). However, by the twentieth century, analytical philosophy seemed to be governed by an ideal of the knowing agent as a dispassionate, rational, highly autonomous individual, following Kant in testing '(e)ven the Holy One of the Gospel' against 'our ideal of moral perfection' (Kant 2012: 23) in a manner famously problematized by Iris Murdoch:

> How recognizable … is the man … who confronted even with Christ turns away to consider the judgement of his own conscience and to hear the voice of his own reason … free, independent, lonely, powerful, rational, responsible, brave, the hero of so many novels and books of moral philosophy. … He is the offspring of the age of science, confidently rational and yet increasingly aware of his alienation from the material universe which his discoveries reveal.
>
> (Murdoch 1970: 80)

This vision of the rational man may also reflect strands of Christian spirituality that seek to disengage the self from the disenchanted universe (Soskice 1992: 60). In challenging this vision, Janet Martin Soskice develops a careful argument for the role of attention in improving our epistemic practice.

Liberal feminists do not radically dissent from the liberal notion of human beings as rational, autonomous, and self-interested individuals. They strongly reject feminist arguments that objectivity and autonomy are unobtainable ideals and harmful to women. Instead, they criticize liberalism for being inadequately objective, inconsistently impartial, and weak in its anticipation of autonomy (Code 1991; Freidman 2003, Nussbaum 2004). Since they aim at knowledge that girls and women can use to overcome inequality, liberal feminists commit to the conviction that knowledge is in principle attainable by all. They reject proposals that women have privileged ways of knowing. Such proposals impose a norm of femininity upon girls and women, and jeopardize the public nature of arguing for their rights.

A leading proponent of liberal feminism within theology is Daphne Hampson. She is shocked by a dangerous passivity in poststructuralist feminism, in which women accept that they have been created and subjected by language, rather than seeing themselves as autonomous agents able to assert their rights and carve out their paths (Hampson 2002). Hampson recognizes that, culturally and emotionally, women are socialized to put themselves second. However, she does not excavate how enculturation might radically affect women's power to know, beyond the implication that women develop distorted self-knowledge which they need to amend with self-assertion.

Women of colour notice that being credited as 'human' is a socio-political process, and question liberal feminism's commitment to equality. Delores Williams exposed 'The Colour of Feminism' (1985) when she accused white feminist theology of committing the same sins of exclusion and imperialism as the Christian patriarchy it aimed to amend. Black American women in the 1980s chose the term 'Womanist' in contradistinction from 'feminist' and drew attention to the multiple ways in which black women are marginalized, not only as women but also as black, and not only by white theology and white communities, but also by black theology and black churches (Grant 1979). They revealed a kaleidoscope of marginalization that has muddied the liberal feminist picture of shared human nature.

## Experience and Women's-Voice Feminisms

Experience and women's-voice feminisms include a wide range of positions that bring women's experiences and voices out of obscurity, and explore their power for building up knowledge. They both question the liberal assumption of a basic sameness between men and women, and regard female experiences as providing a valid, or even epistemically advantaged, basis for developing knowledge. Some in this grouping are biological determinists, such as the radical feminist theologian Mary Daly (1978), and regard the distinctive and (pro)creative capacities of women as providing a special female perspective. Others reject biological determinism and view gender as socially constructed, but believe that the deep embeddedness of the construct creates epistemically significant differences between women and men. They also share an epistemological strategy to validate that which is associated with femaleness, as a way of eradicating women's subordination. Carol Gilligan famously made this move regarding moral reasoning (1982). She argued that feminine notions of morality are not less developed than masculine notions, but are differently conceived, owing to women's emphasis on care-giving and their tendency to regard boundaries between self and other as fluid.

Women's-voice feminists are the most racially diverse feminist grouping, and they claim epistemic privilege for the marginalized (e.g. Isasi-Díaz 1996: 2–3, 30). They criticize attempts to over-generalize women's experience, guard against objectification, and are suspicious of claims to objectivity (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 77; cf. MacKinnon 1987). By contrast, experience feminists such as those representing feminist standpoint epistemology (FSE) develop concepts of objectivity within which claims to epistemic privilege can be situated.

FSE, as developed by Sandra Harding in the natural sciences and adapted by Pamela Sue Anderson in philosophy of religion, validates women's ways of knowing according to social perspective. A key claim is that women are marginalized from centres of power, and that in order to acquire knowledge, which is a social and political asset, they need to be able to see not only from their own vantage points but also to imagine what it is like to know and see from the centre of power. In this way, women become at least bi-perspectival, and probably multi-perspectival.

Following this logic through, it is marginalization rather than femaleness per se that may be significant in affording insights and strategies for building knowledge. Marginalized groups may have epistemic privilege in the sense of having to develop the skills to see, hear, and interpret from more than one perspective. Women's-voice theologians claim to have insights beyond those of the 'Euro-American feminist movement', especially since they see Western feminism as concerned with 'the rights of Euro-American middle-class women; rights many times attained at the expense of Hispanic and other minority women' (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 60–1).

As Anderson develops FSE, she aims not at final knowledge, but at fuller objectivity or 'less partial knowledge'. She grapples with a late-twentieth-century ideal of rational agency, one that attempts to take note of feminist critique as well as to exhibit spiritual acuity, and that is therefore more sophisticated than the philosophical hero caricatured by Murdoch. This is the model of the Ideal Observer, adapted by Charles Taliaferro from moral philosophy, and fitted for philosophy of religion in ways that aim rationally and compassionately to describe 'the God's-eye point of view' (Taliaferro 1998: 206; 2005). Taliaferro shares feminist concerns about an idealized view from nowhere that overrides proper attentiveness to our embodied, personal existence. He develops instead an idealized view from everywhere. He upholds impartiality as a regulating ideal, which is sometimes even attainable, and he conceives impartiality as involving rather than evading passion and desire. His model of ideal observation envisages our discovering our authentic point of view through having grappled with the points of view of others.

Significantly, Taliaferro addresses existentialist and feminist concerns, as voiced by Sartre and de Beauvoir, that external observation objectifies us and threatens to eradicate our subjectivity. He does so by seeking spiritual wisdom as to what is involved in discovering our true selves. He considers the God's-eye point of view in light of a meditation on the gaze of God by the fifteenth-century German philosopher and cardinal, Nicholas of Cusa. Nicholas understands God's Absolute Sight as embracing all modes of seeing. Taliaferro suggests, rather as Soskice does in her work on the attentiveness of God, that, far from overriding our subjectivity, the loving gaze of God apprehends our lives within God's broader vision (2005: 82–4). Furthermore, it is God's apprehension that enables us to transcend our limitations and become our authentic selves. Taliaferro suggests that ideal observation theory is 'not delimiting an ideal which may or may not exist, but … demarcating elements in the actual loving Creator God'. He considers God's gaze as working upon us, enabling us to shed our self-delusions, opening up our freedom, and calling us to integrity, so that through relations with God we might gain a 'broader, more comprehensive and exacting perspective', or, to quote Cusa 'If … I have rendered myself by all possible means like unto Thy goodness, then, according to the degree of that likeness, I shall be capable of truth' (Taliaferro 2005: 83, and quoting Cusa, 1928: 16).

Despite finding much to appreciate in Taliaferro's Cusanian version of the ideal observer, Anderson nonetheless rejects it. She suspects that any model of ideal observation will gloss over the difficulties of the personal facts about our knowledge: not only that we see and feel things differently, and might be operating from very different and deeply held religious or other convictions, but also that power relations are involved in those differences, as are the ways we are used to acting and being acted upon. Anderson pitches against any aspiration to ideal observation the complexity of numerous subtle and difficult-to-categorize factors which affect our judgements as to whether something is good or reasonable, and indeed our criteria for what would render a thing good or reasonable. Her reproach echoes Lorraine Code's rebuke that 'only people with the resources and power to believe that they can transcend and control their circumstances would see the detachment that the ideal [observer] demands as even a theoretical option' (Code 1992: 141).

While Anderson likes the Cusanian image of the loving embrace, she argues that we should use Cusa's insights to replace ideal observer theories with a theory of ideal discourse (Anderson 2005). This would be collective discourse in which both partiality and self-awareness of our partiality are acknowledged. Anderson wants to maximize the ways in which people's different points of view are taken on board whilst aiming, nonetheless, to arrive at a collective stage of decision-making. Ideal discourse enables carefully thought-through, committed positions to be recognized as rational and potentially insightful, rather than for such positions to be relegated to the lower steps of our journey towards a transcendent ideal. Anderson's goal is to reach conclusions that disparate parties can agree incorporate 'better than any other outcome what each regards as ethically significant' (2005: 92), rather than to achieve, in Taliaferro's words, 'a comprehensive view from everywhere'.

A central question that emerges from this exchange between Anderson and Taliaferro is where wisdom is to be found. Despite arguing for a view from everywhere, Taliaferro favours an exploration inwards so as to discover how 'All limited modes of seeing exist without limitation in Absolute Sight' (Taliaferro 2005: 83, quoting Cusa 1928: 10). Anderson favours a process whereby all our complexities are brought to the table, albeit in their most considered form, as the means by which we gain the least partial, most fully objective outcome. Anderson moves us from naïve simplicity into awareness of complexity. Her image of collective discourse is one of fullness, but perhaps without wholeness. Collective discourse might lead us to the equivalent of prayers that are written by committee; offending no one, but also meeting no one in the depth of their being. Taliaferro's approach hints at a deeper simplicity on the far side of complexity: not by deeming the complexity untrue or worthy of relegation, but by seeing it somehow embraced and transformed. His approach invites us to explore a paradox (expressed in metaphor, as paradox usually is): that turning inwards or downwards can grant us more expansive sight. We revisit this paradox in various forms later in the chapter.

## Poststructuralist Feminisms

Poststructuralist feminists are influenced by the Francophone women Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva, who respond to the psychoanalytical philosophy of Lacan and Derrida. Poststructuralists argue that meaning is constituted through language, and language is prior to experience. Kristeva proposes that even entering the linguistic realm represses a child's primal creativity.

Holding that all our experiences and concepts are discursively constructed, postructuralist feminists problematize notions of 'women' and 'women's experience' as false universals, thereby undercutting both liberal and experience feminisms. Women are not defined by language, as though language were representational, Mary McClintock Fulkerson explains. Rather, language creates reality, such that we are constituted by discourse and need to be aware of the power relations at play in discursive activity. Fulkerson seeks to 'change the subject' in order to 'take seriously the location where "woman" is "produced"' and respect 'its multiple identities'. She regards identity politics as crucial (Fulkerson 1994: 8–9, 11), as indeed do many women's-voice feminists (Piu-lan 2002), and experience feminists such as Anderson. Liberal feminists, by contrast, reject identity politics as undermining the bases on which we argue for equality, and they regard as appallingly passive the notion that we are constructed by the language of others.

Postructuralist feminists emphasize locality over universality, partiality over impartiality, contingency over necessity, ambiguity over unity, subjectivity over objectivity, and fracture over closure. They look for what is being repressed when normative accounts (those claiming to be universal, impartial, rational, unified, objective, final) of reality are offered. Most are therefore inherently suspicious of epistemology, which by its very nature sets norms for what does and does not count as knowledge.

Susan Parsons is unusual amongst postructuralist feminists in wanting to embody 'truth'; a concept that most poststructuralists reject because it creates exclusion (see e.g. Fulkerson 1994). Parson's understands passivity as how God's truth is realized within us: 'is it not the theologian's burden to be the place wherein truth comes to dwell, and thus to be always vulnerable to the havoc caused by its arrival?' (Parsons 2002: 130–1). In what seems like a contrary move to that of Parsons, but is perhaps complementary, Isasi-Díaz claims the power to name oneself. She claims the name *mujerista* theology so as to articulate the faith of Latin American women (or, Parsons might say, the truth of God in them):

> To name oneself is one of the most powerful acts a person can do. A name is not just a word by which one is identified. A name also provides the conceptual framework, the point of reference, the mental constructs that are used in thinking, understanding, and relating to a person, an idea, a movement.
>
> (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 60)

Grace Jantzen develops a postructuralist feminist philosophy of religion. She diagnoses the Western philosophical tradition as 'masculinist' and 'necrophiliac', by which she means that it is biased towards maleness and its cultural associations, including a yearning for immortality, and suppresses femaleness, birth, life, and beauty (Jantzen 1998, 2004). Jantzen narrates a scene in which the cellist of Sarajevo, Vedran Smailović, plays whilst bombs fall around him. ' "You are mad … Can't you see what's happening?", shouted soldiers. "Yes", he said. "Look. Can't *you* see what's happening? And you say that *I* am mad?" ' (2004: 3, emphasis in original). Jantzen takes this scenario to reveal how we are in the thrall of death, unable to cope with beauty, and affected by a kind of madness. She offers to our madness the 'therapy of philosophy', believing that a psychoanalytical approach could open the 'springs of well-being' (2004: 3, 4).

Jantzen regards epistemological endeavour as a distraction from the ethical work of promoting human flourishing (1998: 264). She also argues that our epistemological assumptions betray the very allure of immortality that is part of our sickness. We assume, she says, that 'it is only when the rational human subject is released from its troublesome body that it will truly be godlike' (1998: 28–9). Hence, in philosophy of religion, God is typically modelled on the male, rational subject, as unaffected and all-seeing, as exemplified in Richard Swinburne's thought-experiment as to what it must be like to be an omnipresent spirit (Swinburne 1977: 104–5; Jantzen, 1998: 28–9, 36–7). Jantzen counteracts this vision of limitless, bodiless being by proposing that to become divine is to become fully human. Therefore, our primary task is to 'develop our own identities', which are bounded by birth (1998: 26), rather than to pursue epistemology, which is beset by yearnings for immortality.

Feminist engagement with epistemology is diverse. Strains of feminism that make difference and complexity our foremost reality are chary of epistemology, which by nature develops norms and thereby looks beyond difference. Experience feminists such as Anderson try to contain this tension, but in ways that may be vexing to other feminists. Liberal feminists are concerned that emphasizing difference typecasts women or promotes passivity, and that questioning epistemological norms undermines arguments for justice and equality. Poststructuralist feminists may reject epistemological endeavour for operating naïvely with language and experience, and for distracting us from the real business of actualizing human flourishing. Women's-voice theologians typically share poststructuralist circumspection about norms, but also maintain that marginalization yields insight.

## Vigilant Subjectivity and Epistemology

Is it possible to maintain the vigilant subjectivity of feminist critique while aiming at knowledge or truthfulness, which imply criteria for objectivity? Vigilant subjectivity requires attentiveness, courage, and perseverance to leave no stones unturned, no constructs unexamined, under which people's lives might be buried. Pursuit of knowledge or truthfulness involves creating norms that abstract from our differences. Jantzen proceeds as though it were not possible to hold the two together, even though vigilance would seem to be an epistemic virtue (cf. Isasi-Díaz 1996: 76–8), and so she forsakes the task of epistemology (see e.g. 1998: 79, 235–6, 250, 257). Anderson maintains that it is possible to be both vigilantly subjective and to build up knowledge, so long as we keep our multiplicity in full view and full voice. A risk with Anderson's approach is that we remain only in our multivocal discourse, like so many trees unable to form a wood—unable to take on a shape for living together in the world. The opposite danger, which Anderson aims to avert, is that we impose the form of a wood simplistically and falsely, overlooking and ill-serving many actual species.

A thinker who may help unite vigilant subjectivity with epistemological endeavour is the German poet and playwright Friedrich Schiller. His letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (2004) articulate the paradox at play between how we experience life and how we reason. Schiller writes not about knowledge, but about truth as revealed in beauty or the ideal human life. Against the backdrop of the Reign of Terror in France, he explores what it is to realize humanity. In promoting an aesthetic education, he is interested in the social formation of the knowing subject. He argues that culture inflicts a wound upon modern humanity, dividing people into ranks and occupations and putting at variance harmonious powers within our nature: 'While in one place a luxuriant imagination ravages the hard-earned fruits of the intellect, in another the spirit of abstraction stifles the fire at which the heart might have warmed itself and the fancy been kindled' (2004: 39).

Considering human potentiality and fulfilment, Schiller identifies within us 'two contrary forces' that 'impel us to realize their object', and which he therefore calls 'impulses' (2004: 64). These are the sensory impulse and the formal impulse, both of which aim at truth, and neither of which can get there without the other. The object of the sensory impulse includes 'all material being and all that is immediately present in the senses'. The formal impulse gives 'shape' to the sensory (76, Schiller acknowledges his debt to Kant, 24), and works with reason or principles. If form does not allow itself to be impacted by sense, it looks only for the infinite point and does not admit of the world. As an example, Schiller notes our lack of progress in the physical sciences when we make teleological judgements without admitting all the diversity that Nature 'vigorously and variously' touches upon our senses (70–1, n. 1). Parallel examples from feminist critique would include ways in which theology overlooks female lives, and indeed feminist theology overlooks race, social-stratification, and other variables noted by women of colour. But Schiller also warns that the sensory impulse, if not impacted on by the formal, remains passive: an observation strikingly in tune with Hampson's critique of Parsons.

Schiller argues that if the two impulses are not brought together to moderate one another, either the sensory predominates and we fail to become ourselves, or the formal predominates and we will never be other than ourselves in that we shield ourselves from impact; either way we will be 'a non-entity' (70). With feminist critiques of theology in mind, we might say that if the sensory predominates we acknowledge diversity but may be overly passive and embody no theological shape, and if the formal predominates we have a theology that is not true to our lives.

In a passage that speaks directly to liberationist and epistemological concerns, Schiller urges that the formal impulse must never cause a 'dullness of the perceptions', for we would rightly regard that with contempt. Rather, the formal impulse must work an 'operation of freedom' by mitigating 'sensuous intensity', robbing the impressions 'of their depth in order to increase their breadth' (72). In other words, form brings freedom by moderating the impact of the passions, which might otherwise toss us about in a storm. Form meets passionate intensity with a moral intensity, enabling us to appreciate matters more broadly because we are now affected less piercingly. Schiller does not advocate rising above our passions in ways that feminist theorists who are cautious of binary oppositions might imagine. He observes that passions are sometimes moderated detrimentally, and distinguishes between energizing beauty, which rouses those who are languid, and melting beauty, which relaxes those who are tense. These opposite modes of beauty are 'absorbed in the unity of the ideal man' (84).

Schiller's vision of 'the ideal man' is not like the lone rational agent that Murdoch criticizes, nor the omnipresent spirit or Ideal Observer that Jantzen and Anderson reject. Rather, Schiller's ideal is a 'living shape', energized or roused, but at the same time sensitive to harmony and grace (83–4), perhaps like the cellist of Sarajevo. Schiller's ideal human being is an instantiation of beauty which reveals truth. It is contentious to equate beauty with truth, since beauty can fool us, but Schiller sets up the conditions for beauty in terms of the authenticity of bringing the whole of life under consideration. Truth is realized in embodiment. Beauty is instantiated, we might say, in a human being fully alive.

## PARADOX AND PLAY

Schiller acknowledges that he writes philosophy like a poet (2004: 6–7). He is not a systematic thinker, and his views on sense and form are said to vacillate between a synthesis theory and a three-level theory of aesthetic development (Snell 2004: 15). Hegel and post-Hegelian dialectic rather rigidify Schiller's fluid ideas. Our experiment here is whether Schiller's notion of truth or realized humanity can shed light on feminist critique, particularly in the suggestion that we might have knowledge of 'God in aesthetic terms rather than in a strictly propositional or reductively cognitive manner' (Jones 2012: 33; cf. Chopp 1989: esp. 116). We are especially interested in whether his imagery of the ways in which sense and form meet—which depicts not simply balancing a tension, nor preservation through destruction, but rather a total exertion of both impulses such that they cancel one another out and require of one another total content—is insightful for theology. We shall call his approach 'paradoxical', which suits his poetical style, as paradox is something to be shown through metaphor, symbol, drama, or narrative.

According to Schiller, we 'exchange passivity for self-dependence, an inactive determination for an active one', only when sense and form meet and annihilate one another in order to bring one another 'into existence'. Sense and form, the 'experience of life', and awareness of 'the eternal in time and the necessary in the train of chance' are opposites (Schiller 2004: 95–8). Both aim at truth but neither can get there without the other. The passivity of sensory impulse and the activity of reasoning must meet and 'something must first cease'; they must empty one another so that the 'scales of balance stand level', and then they must find 'the greatest possible degree of content', so that the scales 'contain equal weights'. Only then is 'humanity established' (96). Truth is achieved only through paradox.

All but liberal feminists are chary of 'truth claims', but Schiller's notion of truth as life taking shape, shape taking life, and humanity being established, is close to feminist interests. However, where feminist theologies emphasize subjectivity and 'denounce any and all so-called objectivity' (Isasi-Díaz 1996: 77), and privilege complexity over simplicity (Anderson 1998: 86), they do not effect paradox. Approaches that stay with identity politics (Fulkerson) or multi-voice discourse (Anderson) want no shape beyond the 'difference difference makes' (Fulkerson 1994: 381). They might regard it oppressive to look for resolution beyond discourse, or form beyond difference, but they are concerned for human flourishing, and on Schiller's understanding they fall short of realization.

It is a question for feminist theologians whether or not to bring our diversity to the table, our identity politics to the altar, and hold them before Christ in whom there is no male or female, slave or free (Gal. 3:27–8). There is no illusion about the dangers, ambiguities, and power structures inherent in this proposal, and feminist theologians have differing attitudes about risking the paradox of losing our identity in order to find our identity (Hampson 1996; Coakley 2002). If attempted too formally, if we reach for the infinite point without bringing with us the whole of life, parts of life will be subsumed—consider an attempted male takeover of Communion in the illustration below. But if we achieve the paradox, by giving up for transformation all that we are, we move into greater realization of who we truly are.

Elizabeth Johnson recounts a story that illustrates the paradox at play. Play is, according to Schiller, how we bring our sensory and formal impulses together in the right way so as to reach truth: 'As [the mind] comes into association with ideas, everything actual loses its seriousness, because it grows small; and as it meets with perception, necessity puts aside its seriousness, because it grows light' (2004: 78). Johnson quotes a letter from a friend, a male priest in Phokeng, South Africa, who was presiding at Communion and noticed that some women and girls were denied access to the altar. The priest discovered that men from the parish council had decided that women could not receive communion unless they wore hats. So at the next service, in full vestments he asked to borrow the hat of a woman in the front pew, 'a blue hat with white ribbons.… I put the hat on my head … adjusted [it] here and there and asked how I looked'. This produced laughter, and the priest then read Galatians 3:27–8 to 'rapt attention'. On the basis of this equality in Christ, he said, 'I want to see all men with hats on if they want to go to communion'. We might say that the priest had enabled the serious discriminatory practice to grow 'small' and the scriptural principle to feel 'light', by playfully juxtaposing the two. 'I found the gap and went right through it', he wrote, 'speaking about discrimination against women in the church' (Johnson 2015: 71–2). The women, and then some of the men, danced in the aisles—more play—and the congregation embodied a profound truth about equality in Christ.

Play is not '*mere* game', Schiller insists, but is what 'makes man complete' (79). Indeed, 'Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a man, and *he is only wholly Man when he is playing*' (80, original emphases). Instead of banishing the men and their discriminatory ideas, the priest played with them, and thereby disclosed the truth about Christian equality. Everyone played along—neither the women nor the men walked out, but all brought themselves to the altar—and the Communion was therefore able to be what it truly is, a service of union rather than division; a service created out of Jesus's own act of play when he broke bread just before he was betrayed, and passed it round to his disciples saying 'this is my body', and the church's further act of play in turning the devastation of the cross into a central act of worship. '[D]ramatically, most everything in Christianity which is beautiful and uplifting is, in fact, the reversal of a taboo', writes the priest and psychotherapist Beaumont Stevenson (2010: 7). Symbol, which in Greek means to bring unlike things together, is, Jung says, how we are healed, that is, made whole. Jung draws upon Nicholas of Cusa's image of the *complexion oppositorum* in describing 'the synthesis of opposites', and is influenced by Schiller in his theory of symbol and human wholeness. We take on demonic possibilities that otherwise materialize in violence, and perform the 'divine service' of reconciling the opposites within the God-image itself (Jung 1989: 338–41; Bishop 2007–8). Ironically, if feminist theologians remove that which is experienced as oppressive, they behave diabolically, that is, splitting things into good and bad, which 'separates out the very grit around which a pearl might be formed' (Stevenson 2010: 4).

## Paradoxical Lessons for the Epistemology of Theology

If we accept that truth is embodied through paradox, we can suggest at least the following four lessons for the epistemology of theology.

First, evade neither the complexity of life for fear of being swamped, nor epistemological endeavour for fear of being subsumed. Both must hold together in our theology, otherwise we will be a non-entity—either an array of complex lives without (theological) shape, or a (theological) form without life. Neither the complex array nor the lifeless form would have successfully embodied truth.

Second, do not only hold sense and form together, but hold them in proper balance. Feminist vigilance tackles over-formality in theology and spirituality, which may otherwise go unnoticed. Consider Martin Laird's modern classic in contemplative prayer, *Into the Silent Land*. Laird writes that while it 'is important to pursue and acquire good nutrition, reasonable health, a just society, basic self-respect, the material means by which to live', etc., these things do not 'have a real role in the deeper dynamics of life. For example, they play no role in helping us to die or to become aware of God' (Laird 2006: 10). Laird focuses on the paradox of finding God by 'dying' or 'letting go' (10), but he separates out our material and social needs from the spiritual process of dying. He does not eradicate these needs, but denies them a 'real role in the deeper dynamics of life', and so fails to bring them into balance. Laird may even be taking for granted the work of providing good nutrition, promoting health and justice, and so on, much of which is carried out by women, and he may be nonchalant about women and girls being the most numerous casualties of poor nutrition, insufficient healthcare, and injustice. He voices exactly what Jantzen deplores, a turn towards death and away from practical attention to what helps us to flourish in life; although Jantzen foregoes balance in the opposite direction and is disinclined to see truth-value in the principle that death yields life. A more paradoxical, and thereby more true, account of how dying yields awareness of God would notice how we learn to let go not only in the silence of our prayers, but also through the material social needs of life: by providing for the material needs of others, and by learning to live in our own bodies, which diminish with time and come to require our obedience. Sr Anke describes this dynamic in relation to the menopause, which 'begins in the body as a part of dying' such that our body 'begins to take command, whether we like it or not'. Bodily diminishment forces us 'to have regard to our body', and is paradoxically thereby 'a great opportunity for God to help us to become "one" in ourselves, to learn to be reconciled to this body' (Anke 1990: 8). Sr Anke is explicit that learning to die is something we do in obedience to our bodies, not as though we were separate from them.

Third, instead of separating things into good and bad, bring them together for transformation. Feminists may separate out formal reasoning (hence objectivity, simplicity, infinity, normativity) from their theology, as has been discussed throughout this chapter. They may also reject motifs of 'dying', 'letting go' or 'self-emptying'. Jantzen suppresses mortality in favour of natality, and Hampson regards 'self-giving' as a surrender of autonomy, and as reason not to be Christian (Jantzen 1998; Hampson 1996). Sarah Coakley, in contrast, holds that 'self-emptying', as occurs in contemplative prayer, 'is not a negation of self, but the place of the self's transformation and expansion into God' (Coakley 2002: 36). Epistemologically, the question is whether 'self-emptying' yields a truer self: one who is both more truly herself and has truer understanding.

Insofar as self-emptying involves shedding such obstacles to knowledge as prejudices, sloth, inattentiveness, dishonesty, self-protectiveness, and self-deception, it will improve our success at aiming at truth. The removal of such hindrances might be expressed as getting ourselves (our fearful self-regard) out of the way to make room for God. The process is not our 'doing' so much as our 'receiving', and so the language of passivity is often used, and yet shedding our fears and ingrained patterns of thought requires labour, and the arduousness of the process invokes the imagery of birth. Parsons speaks of our becoming the 'birthplace of the divine' (Parsons 2002: 131).

Hampson, who holds on to autonomy and rejects the 'passivity' of receiving, would not find feminist images of birth any more salutary than those of 'dying' or 'letting go'. Dying and giving birth are not quite parallel images, however. Dying brings the challenge of ultimacy. Birth enables us to put ourselves into what will continue. We can generate life for others up until our own deaths (sometimes tragically in childbirth), by how we live our dying. But death itself leaves nothing over for future choice and action, and so the surrender is total. This is why it is so stark, and the paradox so shocking: death is swallowed up in life (1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 5). Accepting that paradox gives us courage to go into such bad or difficult realities as war, discrimination, and diminishment.

Fourth, do not pull back from the paradoxical turning point. Sr Anke notices the paradox in her diminishing body, rather than looking outside her body for lessons on how to die and become whole. The priest in Phokeng found the paradoxical turning point not by sidelining the men's discrimination but by going down into it to the point of putting a hat on his own head, and meeting it with a principle of equality. Thereby, the truth of our equality in Christ was realized. By contrast, Jantzen does not identify the point of paradox in her example of the Sarajevan cellist. She writes as though the soldiers are trying to get beauty out of the way, rather than save the cellist's life, and that all would be well if only we would love beauty instead of death. In reality, the bombs provoked the cellist to play at the heart of the fighting. He met the base experience of war with the transcendence of music, and profound truth emerged: music is more powerful than bombs; we can recover our humanity. Consider how, in the besieged and starving city of Leningrad, Shostakovich worked 'fast and furiously' on his 'Leningrad Symphony'. 'I couldn't not write it', he said. 'War was all around. I had to be together with the people.' In response to the remarkable performances in Moscow and in Leningrad itself, writer Olga Berrgolts and conductor Karl Eliasberg commented: 'I looked at [Shostakovich], a small frail man in big glasses, and I thought: this man is more powerful than Hitler'; 'the whole city had found its humanity. And in that moment we triumphed over the soulless Nazi war machine' (quoted in Moynahan 2013: 108, 417, 487). If we are to realize our humanity in the face of violence, mortality, or discrimination, we must not wish away these terrible realities but must meet them at the fullest point, and annihilate them through play. That is how we are transformed.

## Concluding Remarks

We have considered paradox as that from which truth emerges and as that which holds together things that seem incompatible. Feminist theologians may evade paradox if, in promoting subjectivity, complexity, fecundity, and self-transformation, they reject or relegate objectivity, simplicity, mortality, or self-emptying. It is the paradoxical dynamic between such opposites that yields life and truth.

Some of the following epistemological lessons can be learned by incorporating paradox: holding sense and form in proper balance and attending to details; looking for transformation rather than eradication of the 'bad'; and not stopping short of the paradoxical turning point. Questions arise as to whether 'spiritual' processes that differ from our normal cognitive ones are involved in learning these lessons. Would the 'spiritual' process simply be the deepening of what we notice and are prepared to undergo, or would it differ qualitatively from other cognitive processes? Those questions require ongoing consideration. This chapter portrays an epistemological paradox: the deeper we go in a process of self-emptying, or in attending to specific, even dangerous situations, the more expansive our understanding becomes. This paradox contradicts ideals of rationality that envisage height rather than depth as an advantage; ideals which feminists have rightly distrusted.

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## CHAPTER 41

# PENTECOSTALISM

JAMES K. A. SMITH

## Epistemic Fit and Pentecostal Experience

What is the appropriate set of epistemic evaluations for an encounter with a God who surprises us, who is free to elude our expectations and transcend our 'forehavings' (as Heidegger described them)? What sorts of doxastic practices (Alston 1989) 'fit' an encounter with the Spirit of the living God witnessed in the book of Acts, who subverts our epistemic expectations? Can there even be an 'epistemology' of the unexpected? Can we possibly 'know' when we do not even know what to expect? Would not this already box in our experience, circumscribing God's ability to surprise us with healings and resurrections?

Any attempt to sketch a Pentecostal epistemology must wrestle with these tensions and paradoxes, precisely because Pentecostal spirituality hinges on an openness to surprise by the Spirit of God, recounted in the book of Acts, who subverted expectations (see Acts 2). If the epistemology of theology is concerned with the 'epistemic fit' between our epistemic evaluations and the subject matter under investigation, then the 'subject matter' of a Pentecostal epistemology could be understood in two different ways: (1) we will consider what epistemic evaluations are appropriate when we encounter the God of Pentecostal experience, and (2) we will be concerned with epistemic habits and practices that are effectively embedded *in* 'Pentecostal experience'. These pursuits are not mutually exclusive, and no doubt an exploration of the latter probably takes a de facto stand on the former. In other words, the doxastic practices of Pentecostal communities are what they are precisely because of their convictions about God's nature as revealed in Jesus and communicated by the Spirit.

In this chapter, my method is to undertake epistemology as a kind of ethnography—an explication of doxastic habits and practices of a community of faith (i.e. Pentecostalism) in order to make explicit the epistemology that is implicit in Pentecostal spirituality.

This method can be understood as a pragmatic exercise in the heritage of Wittgenstein, Rorty, and especially the work of Robert Brandom (see Brandom 1994 and 2000, and Smith 2014).

What is meant by 'Pentecostal' in this project of articulating a Pentecostal epistemology? To answer a question of this sort, we need to first appreciate something of the history of Pentecostal and charismatic movements throughout the twentieth century. Pentecostalism is often traced to the Azusa Street revival of 1906–13, but there were similar but independent revivals happening before and after this around the world. Thus it is important to eschew a US-centric account of this worldwide phenomenon. As Allan Anderson counsels:

> Pentecostalism is not a movement that had a distinct beginning in the USA or anywhere else, or a movement that is based on a particular doctrine—it is a movement or rather a series of movements that took several years and several different formative events to emerge. Pentecostalism then as now is a polynucleated and variegated phenomenon.
>
> (Anderson 2007: 4)

With deep roots in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition and African spirituality, the Azusa Street revival engendered what came to be described as 'classical' Pentecostalism associated with denominations such as the Assemblies of God, the Church of God in Christ, and the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) (see Hollenweger 1972, Dayton 1987, Blumhofer 1993, and Wacker 2001). 'Classical' Pentecostalism was also usually distinguished by a distinct emphasis on speaking in tongues as 'the initial physical evidence of baptism of the Holy Spirit'. Taking up 'second work' theologies from their Wesleyan heritage, which emphasized an experience of grace and sanctification subsequent to and distinct from salvation, 'classical' Pentecostal theology identified this as baptism in the Holy Spirit 'evidenced' by speaking in tongues—though they also emphasized the continued manifestation of *all* the gifts of the Spirit. And all of this energizing of the Spirit was directed towards empowerment for mission (Menzies 1994; Macchia 2006: 75–85).

In North America in the 1960s and 1970s, Pentecostal-like phenomena and experiences began to be seen in more mainline denominations and traditional churches. This was identified as the 'charismatic renewal' and signalled a spillover of Pentecostal spirituality into traditional communions, including the Catholic charismatic renewal (first begun at Duquesne) as well as renewal movements in Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterian traditions (see Hocken 2002: 477–519). While the spirituality and practices shared certain similarities, especially an emphasis on the Spirit's surprise and the continued operation of even the 'miraculous' gifts, the charismatic movement did not adopt the classical Pentecostal notion of 'initial evidence'. So capital-P Pentecostalism is usually taken to refer to classical Pentecostalism; 'charismatic' identifies those traditions and theologians who also emphasize a central role for the Spirit's gifts, but within existing liturgical and theological frameworks. These were later followed by what is often called the 'third wave' or 'neopentecostal' movement associated with Peter Wagner. This refers to the growth of non-denominational charismatic churches such as Vineyard Fellowship (the subject of a brilliant anthropological study by Tanya Luhrmann (2013)). Like the charismatic renewal, third-wave charismatics do not affirm initial evidence, but neither do they identify with traditional denominations or communions (such as the Roman Catholic Church or the Anglican Communion). And similar versions of such ecstatic 'Pentecostal' Christianity are the norm of Christian existence in most of the world (Anderson 2007).

While there are important differences between classical Pentecostals, charismatics, and 'third wavers', there are also important similarities that are shared across these movements, particularly regarding the centrality of the Spirit, the gifts, and the shape of Pentecostal/charismatic spirituality. Thus some, like Douglas Jacobsen, have adopted the nomenclature of 'small-p' pentecostalism as a way of honouring the diversity of pentecostal/charismatic theolog*ies* while at the same time recognizing important family resemblances and shared sensibilities (Jacobsen 2003). Indeed, the charismatic movement has been a crucial factor in the development of ecumenical dialogue. Protestant Pentecostals and Catholic charismatics have found that a shared experience was an important start to honest and open conversations about what they shared in common, and where they disagreed (McDonnell 1995).

So, by 'Pentecostal', I mean to refer not to a classical or denominational definition, but rather to an understanding of Christian faith that is radically open to the continued operations of the Spirit. Thus I use 'Pentecostal' in an older, generous sense, which would include 'charismatic' traditions (and I myself identify as charismatic, not as Pentecostal). Since the convention Pentecostal/charismatic is so burdensome, in what follows I will generally employ the convention of small-p 'pentecostalism' to refer to the broader 'renewal' or Pentecostal/charismatic traditions. Thus when I articulate a pentecostal epistemology, 'pentecostal' is meant to be a gathering term, indicating a shared set of practices and theological intuitions that are shared by Pentecostals, charismatics, 'third wavers', and a vast majority of Christians around the world.

## TESTIMONY AS PENTECOSTAL PRACTICE

'I know that I know that I know' is a common refrain in pentecostal worship services that make room for testimony and witness (Rowland and Kilby 2014). And making room for testimony is central to pentecostal spirituality precisely because narrative is central to pentecostal identity. As Grant Wacker observes, 'Like countless Christians before them, early pentecostals assumed that their personal faith stories bore normative implications for others. Consequently, they devoted much of the time in their worship services—maybe a third of the total—to public testimonies about their spiritual journeys' (2001: 58). This narrative function of testimony is understood as bound up in the very DNA of Pentecost where, in Acts 2, we see Peter and the disciples making sense of their experience by weaving it into a larger received narrative: to be able to say that 'this is that' (Acts 2:16, pointing to Joel 2:28–32) is to frame and make sense of the phenomenon by situating it within a narrative. Steven Land reminds us that this narratival hermeneutic is also eschatological: it is not just a matter of filling in a 'back story', it also projects a future that is envisioned by the narrative (Land 1993: 72 n. 1). This same narratival move was then repeated by early pentecostals in the 1900s who, confronted with strange phenomena, made sense of them by framing them in terms of a larger narrative (namely the biblical story) that is also ultimately eschatological (see e.g. McPherson 2006: 186–96).

In testimony, then, pentecostals enact an identity by writing themselves into the larger story of God's redemption: 'Crucifixion, resurrection, Pentecost, parousia, all formed one great redemption, one story in which they were participants with assigned roles to play'. Narrative provided a framework to make sense of their own struggles and victories: 'by interpreting their daily life and worship in terms of the significant events of biblical history, their own lives and actions were given significance' (Land 1993: 72–3). And this narrative understanding of God's action yielded a practice that was integral to pentecostal worship: testimony. Wacker considers the basic structure and substance of early Pentecostal testimony in 2001: 58–69. Testimonies, from around the world, also made up a significant part of the material published in *The Apostolic Faith*, the newsletter of the Azusa Street Mission published from 1906–8. As Wacker summarizes, 'The testimony forcefully asserted that the believer's passage on this earth formed part of a magnificent drama in which cosmic good vanquished evil. … Each person's private struggles somehow soared above the merely private and reappeared in a framework that spanned the millennia' (Wacker 2001: 69).

I want to suggest that this affirmation of testimony—particularly when coupled with a unique pentecostal affirmation of embodiment (in practices of healing and concern for the poor (see Smith 2010))—has epistemological implications. Pentecostal spirituality engenders doxastic practices that are beyond the ken of the modes of knowing usually accounted for by modern 'intellectualist' epistemologies (on 'intellectualism', see Taylor 1993). Such (largely modern) accounts of knowledge, and what *counts* as 'knowledge', are cut to the measure of objectification and propositional claims of the sort that are most at home in the rationalist assumptions of the Enlightenment. Early Pentecostals in particular were intimately aware of the antithesis between the dreams of modernity and their Spirit-filled visions of the coming kingdom, and hence recognized that what they 'knew'—and how they knew it—would be incommensurate with, we might say, the epistemological paradigms of the mainstream. In fact, we might suggest that the community of faith gathered at Azusa Street had a first-hand acquaintance with the underside of modernity's myths of reason (recall that one of its most important preachers was a son of former slaves). And their *experience* of meeting God in embodied worship led them to resist and reject the rationalism of modernity in favour of an understanding that gave primacy to the affections, to the 'heart'. In other words, the philosophical anthropology embedded in pentecostal faith and practice does not yield a 'thinking thing', but rather an embodied heart that 'understands' the world in ways that are irreducible to the categories and propositions of cognitive 'reason'—akin to what Merleau-Ponty describes as ‘erotic comprehension’ (2002: 178–201). In testimony, when the pentecostal believer claims that ‘I know that I know that I know’, she is trying to express that *how* she knows and what *counts* as knowledge cannot be formulated simply as ‘I know X’ or ‘I have a justified true belief about Y’ (but nor does it preclude such, it should be noted). She will not reduce the criteria for knowledge to those accepted by the cognitive majority. In pentecostal experience there is a construal of the world and an understanding of God that is irreducible to the tidy categories of cognition. That does not constitute a rejection of cognition or propositional truth; but it does situate and relativize that particular mode of knowing.

## I Love to Tell the Story: A Narrative Pentecostal Epistemology

In a ‘typical’ pentecostal testimony, we would note several things of epistemological import: First, the testifier recounts what she knows—what she ‘knows that she knows that she knows’—in a narrative form. But she doesn’t merely provide information, articulate propositions, or make factual claims. She will recount a story—a sequence of events with a narrative arc, with a crisis and complications, even with elements of suspense building to a climax (Ricoeur 1984 would say that such narrative features indicate a process of ‘emplotment’). Indeed, it will often be interesting to find that even when a pentecostal believer might give her testimony for the first time, she might seem to emerge on the scene as an accomplished storyteller. This is because she has been inhaling stories as the oxygen of pentecostal worship. Second, a pentecostal ‘witness’ locates her story within another story: her micro-narrative from immediate, personal experience is allusively situated within the macro-narrative of scripture. Her unique, contemporary experience is situated and signified against the backdrop of other ‘exemplars’, as it were (cf. Baehr 2013). So a woman who may testify to healing of her barrenness will tell her story in light of Sarah’s story. This wider story both gives her own story a narrative arc, but also provides a context for the meaning of her own story. Third, God is a character in pentecostal testimony; the Spirit is an agent, a player, in this narrative. Indeed, one might say that the Spirit is the protagonist of the story even if not always explicitly named.

Telling stories comes ‘naturally’ to pentecostals—‘naturally’ in the sense of a ‘second nature’, an acquired habit, a disposition. Kenneth Archer has articulated the importance of pentecostalism’s narrativity, describing ‘the Pentecostal story’ as the ‘hermenutical filter’ by which pentecostals make sense of their world and their experience (2004: 94–126). The world of experience is layered by stories: the believer’s experience is situated vis-à-vis the story of the ‘Latter Rain’ outpouring at Azusa Street, which is read in light of the outpouring at Pentecost (Acts 2) whose significance, in turn, is understood against the prophetic heritage of Israel (Joel 2).

I want to build on Archer's analysis in order to suggest ways in which the role of story in pentecostal spirituality highlights the limits of regnant epistemological paradigms, particularly within Christian (and perhaps especially evangelical) philosophical circles (for the purposes of my argument, I will treat 'story' and 'narrative' as synonymous. Other analyses pose different questions and distinguish stories from narratives, where narratives, for example, will be understood as a particular kind of story with a resolution or conclusion. For further discussion, see Barwell 2009: 49). I seek here to undertake a kind of ethnography (or phenomenology) of an aspect of pentecostal spirituality, precisely in order for it to function as a liminal case study, pushing back on existing paradigms and thus becoming a productive catalyst for theoretical revision, drawing on a kind of inchoate 'genius' embedded in pentecostal experience.

In particular, I want to suggest that pentecostal testimony points to the irreducibility (and perhaps primacy) of 'narrative knowledge'—a way of perceiving the world (and God's action in the world) that operates on a pre-intellectual register, akin to what Heidegger described as *Verstehen*, 'understanding' (Heidegger 1962; see also Dreyfus 1991; Tolksdorf 2012). So 'narrative knowledge' denotes a certain *kind* of knowledge, distinct from run-of-the-mill knowledge which is usually understood (philosophically) as 'justified true belief', where 'belief' is understood as assent to propositions, or at least characterized by a propositional attitude. 'Narrative knowledge', then, would be a different kind of knowing, knowledge of a different order, on a different register—knowing by other means. Rather than propositional assent or secured representations, such knowing is a mode of perception that is a kind of aesthetic synthesis: the world (and God's activity within it) is grasped the way one 'understands' a melody.

There is, on this account, a 'distinct understanding that narratives supply' that is 'inseparable from its form' (Barwell 2009: 49). And it is just this sort of epistemological intuition that is implicit in pentecostal spirituality. For the pentecostal practice of testimony, narrative is not just a decorative form, a creative medium, a jazzier vehicle for truths that can be distilled and known otherwise. If the testimony is translated into 'mere' facts, codified into propositions, distilled into ideas, then we are dealing with a different animal: I would both 'know' something different and 'know' it differently.

Narrative knowledge is not *opposed to* propositional or quantifiable or 'codeable' knowledge, but it does relativize and situate such knowledge. At issue in an epistemology of narrative knowledge is not so much securing knowledge as 'justified true belief' but rather providing an account of how we *understand* the world. (Following Rorty, we might think of such an epistemology as 'hermeneutics' (see Smith 2014: 93–6).) However, the difference between 'knowledge' and 'understanding' here does present a challenge for pentecostal methodology in theology and philosophy (see Archer 2007: 6). 'Pentecostal knowledge', we might say, is narrative knowledge, but the genres of philosophical analysis and theological articulation are decidedly non-narratival (something Stump articulates in 2009). Even 'narrative theology' is a genre of propositional and theoretical analysis that makes the case for the importance of narrative in a non-narratival mode. In this context I am reminded of Christine Overall's account of 'autobiographical philosophy' as a mode of resistance to regnant methodological paradigms in philosophy: 'feminists have to continue to resist cultural messages that say women's lives are not important, our experiences have no significance, and our feelings are excessive or uncontrolled and therefore irrational [a pretty common description of pentecostals!]. Autobiographical philosophy is a way of "talking back" to those messages' (Overall 2008: 233). This is why I believe a pentecostal epistemology overlaps in significant respects with the concerns of feminist epistemology (despite enduring patriarchy in some streams of pentecostalism).

So what characterizes 'narrative knowledge'? What is irreducible about narrative knowledge? In a way that particularly resonates with pentecostal experience, David Velleman has suggested that what is distinctive about narrative knowledge is found in the connection between narratives and emotions. Narratives articulate a kind of 'emotional understanding'; a narrative 'means something to an audience in emotional terms' (2003: 6). But what does that mean? What is the connection between narrative and emotion? Velleman and others suggest it is twofold: First, the claim indicates that the way narratives work is affective. A narrative makes sense of a life, a series of events, or an experience by a 'logic' that is not deductive but affective. The linkage and production of meaning is not the result of a cognitive inference but rather an affective construal. A story is 'a particular way of organizing events into an intelligible whole' (Velleman 2003: 1), but the mode of this organization 'is at bottom an affective one. The essential narrative connection is neither causal nor temporal; instead it is emotive' (Livingston 2009: 31). One is almost tempted to fall back on the old language of 'faculties' to try to describe this. With such a lexicon, we could say that narrative is a way of understanding the world that draws upon an affective or emotive faculty (rather than a judgement about the world effected by the intellect). But, second, narrative works on this affective register precisely because the emotions are themselves already 'construals' of the world (Roberts 1988, 2003). The emotions themselves are already hermeneutic filters, 'noncognitive affective appraisals' (Robinson 1997) doing the work of interpreting our world. Narrative is a mode of explication and articulation that feeds off (and fuels) the sort of affective, imaginative construal of the world that already characterizes the emotions. In other words, there is a kind of 'fit' or proportionality between narrative and our affective register; and, in concord, both work to 'make sense' of our world and our experience in a way that is irreducible.

If there is an irreducibility of narrative knowledge, there may also be a *primacy* of narrative understanding that bubbles up from our embodiment as an adaptive strategy of our evolutionary development. Anthony Damasio, Daniel Dennett, and others have emphasized the ways in which the construction of an 'I'—an identity—is bound up with being able to tell a story about oneself. Perhaps the strongest and most comprehensive version of this claim is found in Alasdair MacIntyre (1984: 216): 'man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal.' As Oliver Sacks once put it, 'each of us constructs and lives a "narrative", and this narrative *is* us, our identities' (1987: 110, emphasis in original). And there might be a sense in which we are 'wired' to be storytellers, that storytelling comes 'naturally' in a 'first nature' sense as well. Damasio argues that 'the self' is the narratival product of the neurological structure of the brain that yields what he describes as a 'feeling of knowing' (1995: 6–7). The storiedness of our identity, on this account, emerges not just as a cultural construct but from our bodies. As Paul John Eakin summarizes, 'narrative is biological before it is linguistic and literary' (2004: 128). So if, as he concludes, 'the identity narrative impulse that autobiographies express is the same that we respond to everyday in talking about ourselves', and if 'both may be grounded in the neurobiological rhythms of consciousness', then we might conclude that the pentecostal impetus to narrative and testimony gives expression to this fundamental, bodily impulse.

There is a further sense in which pentecostal testimony 'gives voice' to narrative identity—by providing an occasion and opportunity for the poor to find a story and articulates their own story. In our culture of the twenty-something memoir, we should recognize that the bourgeoisie have no shortage of opportunities to 'find their voice' and 'tell their story'. Indeed, the privilege of a liberal arts education institutionalizes such. But the implicit democracy of pentecostal worship means that *everyone*'s story is significant. Pentecostal worship *evokes* a story and gives *all* people an occasion and space to narrate their identity.

Story, then, is not just an optional 'package' for propositions and facts; nor is narrative just a remedial or elementary form of knowledge that is overcome or outgrown by intellectual maturity. (Even 'we moderns', Christian Smith emphasizes, 'not only continue to be animals who make stories but also animals who are *made by* our stories' (2003: 64).) Rather, narrative is a fundamental and irreducible mode of understanding—and 'pentecostal knowledge' attested in testimony bears witness not only to the Spirit's work but also to this epistemological reality. But our existing epistemological paradigms and categories are not well calibrated to deal with 'narrative knowledge'. Our epistemological tools, as it were, are better suited to discrete 'beliefs' and facts, 'items' of knowledge that can be articulated in propositions, plugged into syllogism, and 'defended' by apologetic strategies. And while we might even have epistemologies that make room for the Holy Spirit (e.g. Plantinga 2000: 290ff.), we do not have an array of epistemological theories or tools that honor and make sense of the *kind* of knowledge that characterizes 'narrative knowledge'. In short, pentecostal experience and testimony may require us to stretch our epistemologies to account for such knowledge. It is in this respect that a pentecostal epistemology will find resonance with pragmatism, a philosophical tradition that has long contested reductionism in philosophy. Wittgenstein's account of an irreducible 'know-how', Peirce's 'abduction' (see Yong 2000), and Brandom's emphasis on practice as the fount for 'articulating reasons' are all trying to get at something that is implicit in pentecostal experience: that there is a means of 'knowing' before and beyond propositions.

This epistemological push from pentecostal experience might actually press philosophers also to develop epistemological models that honour something more like a 'biblical' understanding of knowledge—that is a mode of knowing that is attuned to the holistic picture of human persons in the scriptures signalled in the metaphor of the 'heart' (Clouser 1998; Peters 2009). Indeed, I am struck by the resonance between what I have been describing as pentecostalism's 'narrative knowledge' and recent accounts of

Paul's epistemology. Consider, for instance, Ian Scott's analysis of 'Paul's *way* of knowing' in which we look to Paul as a contemporary resource for thinking about knowledge precisely because '[i]n Paul we have the opportunity to see how someone approached religious knowledge who was at one and the same time foundational in the development of Western culture and yet relatively untouched by epistemological currents which so many now suspect are bankrupt' (2009: 4). Scott unearths a 'narrative structure to the Apostle's knowledge', a distinct narratival 'logic' that is operative beneath his speech (5–6, 10). In doing so, Scott brings 'to the surface [Paul's] tacit assumptions about how people in general can come to knowledge', discerning 'assumptions which the Apostle himself may never have brought to full consciousness' (11).

The focus here is less *what* is known and more a matter of *how* we know. So, for example, in Paul's 'critique of pure reason', as it were (or perhaps better, echoing Dooyeweerd rather than Kant, Paul's critique of the pretended autonomy of theoretical thought), in Rom. 1:21–31 and 1 Cor. 1:18–2:16, Paul's target of critique is 'not reason in and of itself, but reason which has been hijacked by human vices' (Scott 2009: 44). The root problem is 'unwillingness to accept the limits of human autonomy' (28). So the work of the Spirit is not the provision of new *content*, but instead the gracious granting of 'access': 'The Spirit appears in these verses [1 Cor. 2:6–16] not as one who uncovers hidden content, but as one who allows believers to recognize the (openly presented) message as true' (46–7). But the Spirit's epistemological operation in this regard is not magical or Gnostic. The Spirit's gracious epistemological operation involves two aspects. First, it is a mode of moral regeneration—'healing the believers' moral constitution' (47). As Scott puts it, 'The Spirit would thus be responsible for faith in the sense that he restores the human moral constitution, making it possible for human beings to follow the [narrative] logic which leads to the Gospel' (65). Thus, as Scott notes but does not develop, knowledge becomes a matter of *virtue*. (For further discussion of links between virtue and epistemology, see Zagzebski 1996, Treier 2006, and Roberts and Wood 2007.)

Second, the Spirit effects a narratival relocation, situating the believing community within a story that provides a new context for understanding their experience. This is a kind of Spirit-induced paradigm shift. In a way that significantly echoes (or rather, anticipates) Archer's account of the role of narrative in pentecostal understanding, Scott notes that 'the moment of revelation for Paul comes not in the pre-reflective experience but in the *interpretation* of that experience, when the meaning of the experience is hermeneutically grasped and appropriated' (2009: 75–6, emphasis in original). The hermeneutical frame is provided by a story that functions as the 'narrative substructure' of Paul's knowledge (95–6). When Paul thought about theological matters, Scott summarizes, 'his thoughts in fact had a narrative structure. He thought of actions and events which were both causally and temporally related, and which were all governed by the overarching plot of God's rescue of his creation' (118). Here Scott raises an important and obvious question: If Paul's thinking and knowledge is so fundamentally shaped by this narrative, 'then why do we not find him simply telling the story?' (108–9). Why are the epistles so didactic, so *un*like the Gospels? Scott suggests that Paul's own letters are a kind of 'criticism'; that is, they are written in order to help us understand and appreciate the story in the same way that, say, the criticism of Edward Wilson opens up and deepens our appreciation for Nabakov's fiction even though Wilson's criticism is decidedly didactic. The didactic or 'reflective' form of the Pauline epistles, however, still grows 'organically out of the process of narration'. In this way, 'the narrative itself would seem to be primary' even if Paul never simply recounts the story in narrative form.

Thus what Paul preached, and what Paul was calling both Jews and Gentiles to embrace, was not just a constellation of ideas, a set of beliefs, or a collection of doctrines; rather, their salvation depended on affectively and imaginatively absorbing a story—and seeing themselves in that story. Thus for Paul, 'ethical knowledge' is not just a cognitive grasp of laws or duties, or knowledge of a set of moral principles; ethical knowledge is 'the emplotment of one's life in the theological narrative' (10). Later (122–3) Scott shows this is true of Paul himself: 'the "little story" of Paul's life finds meaning by being related to the "big story" of which the organizing center is Christ'. This then raises interesting questions about Paul's own claims to 'knowledge'. For example, when Paul says he 'knows' (*oida*) that his coming to Rome will be 'in the fullness of the blessing of Christ' (Rom. 15:29), what is the ground for that knowledge? What sort of knowledge claim is this? Is this supported by propositions in scripture? Propositions from some secret revelation? Or is Paul engaging in his own narrative deduction? Is this more like Paul saying 'I know that I know that I know'?

Understanding events—which is central to Paul's Gospel—is not a matter of logical deduction, but rather a kind of narratival reasoning. For example, Paul's understanding of causality is not a linear, efficient causality: 'We are rarely presented with cases of a sufficient cause and its inevitable effect. Rather we find the more ambiguous causality which is more common in narrative, in which one event serves as *part of* the reason for another' (Scott 2009: 104, emphasis in original). To understand this distinction between efficient causality and narrative causality, consider our discomfort with some developments in a film. Let us say a film has been following the story of two estranged brothers who have been separated for years. In a climactic scene near the end of the film, the younger brother, distraught and depressed, is on the top of a Brooklyn apartment building, perched there with suicidal intent. In fact, as the camera pans in closely upon his back, he leans forward to take the plunge. In a shot, a hand reaches to grasp him and restrain him from self-destruction. As the younger brother, now on his back, looks up, squinting into the sunshine, he finds himself in the shadow of—you guessed it—his older brother. Now, a filmmaker can deal with the issues of *efficient* causality. They can now sit on the roof of the building, have a beer, with the younger brother asking: 'How did you get here?' The older brother can recount the machinations of how he arrived. But what that won't answer is our *narrative* sense that this 'cause' doesn't make any sense. His arrival is a *deux ex machina*—a shorthand term to describe an event or move within a story which violates not efficient causality but narrative causality. If we can recognize the sort of 'gut' reaction we have at such moments—a 'sense' that something is not right—then we have some intuitive grasp of what I (along with Scott) am calling 'narrative knowledge' and 'narrative causality'. Story makes sense of our world, our experience, and events on a register different from the deductive logic of efficient causality. In short, what Paul 'knows' is *more than* just what he 'thinks' and 'believes' (Scott 2009: 156). It is this kind of knowledge—this sort of 'know-how'—that is implicit in pentecostal spirituality, particularly the practice of testimony and the centrality of story in pentecostal preaching. Making room for this sort of knowledge would be one of the effects of a distinctly pentecostal epistemology.

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